

Exploring Sales Training Through a Socioeconomic Stratum: A Case Study of Independent Commercial Advisors at LA UNICA

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Abstract

In Peru's direct sales sector, most companies do not provide systematic training for their independent sales consultants. When training is offered, it is often conducted internally without a structured, methodological approach to professional development. Such ad-hoc training sessions frequently fail to achieve desired outcomes, as they do not foster trust or long-term relationships with the contracting organization. In larger firms, such as LA UNICA, training planning tends to be focused on specific variables,

often excluding a comprehensive approach for all consultants. This study aimed to explore the relationship between the sales training needs and the socioeconomic status of LA UNICA's independent sales consultants in 2023. This preliminary investigation seeks to inform the design and implementation of tailored training programs based on identified variables. The research employs a dual methodological approach: a case study method is utilized to gain a multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon, while a correlational quantitative approach is employed to examine the relationship between the socioeconomic status of the consultants and their training needs. The results affirm the alternative hypothesis, indicating that as socioeconomic status increases, so do training requirements. Contrary to initial assumptions, findings suggest that LA UNICA should prioritize training efforts towards consultants from higher socioeconomic brackets.

Keywords: Sales, Socioeconomic Level, Training, Peruvian Market

Introduction

This research focuses on sales training, defined as the development of competencies, skills, and abilities that sales professionals acquire to effectively market products and services on behalf of an organization in exchange for financial gain. Key aspects of sales training include the type of training provided, the appropriate timing and duration, methods for evaluating investment returns and overall effectiveness, the optimal setting or context for training delivery, and other variables considered by decision-makers, particularly in environments where resources are limited. Sales training decisions vary significantly between large North American multinationals and smaller Latin American firms, yet the overarching goal remains consistent: to gain a competitive edge over both direct and indirect competitors. The motivation for developing this research topic arises from the need for UNICA's decision-makers to effectively invest strategic resources based on empirical evidence rather than relying solely on intuition or experience. Additionally, there is a notable lack of similar studies, which will be highlighted in the literature review section. The research context is particularly significant, as UNICA faces intensifying competition within the broader landscape of a growing Peruvian economy ([Deeter-Schmelz & Kennedy, 2011](#)).

The primary objective of this research is to examine the relationship between sales training needs and the socioeconomic status of independent sales advisors at LA UNICA in 2023. This analysis aims to inform the design and implementation of an

effective training plan that addresses competence gaps and performance issues among sales managers, enhancing organizational efficiency. The plan will be strategically focused and prioritized towards those most in need of training. In addition to this overarching goal, the study seeks to explore two further aspects: the economic value that sales advisors attribute to training, and the specific needs they perceive as necessary for their professional development (Alowayyid, 2024). Effective training is crucial not only for equipping managers and advisors with essential skills and knowledge but also for generating value for the organization. Conversely, a training strategy that lacks prior diagnosis of sales managers' needs is unlikely to achieve the desired outcomes (Wachner et al., 2009). The research question guiding this study is as follows:

What is the relationship between the sales training needs and the socioeconomic status of independent sales advisors at LA UNICA in the year 2023?

Literature Review

Sales training is a recurrent theme in the business sector due to its critical role in maximizing the performance of human resources. It extends beyond differentiating from competitors or establishing a market position; it embodies a long-term strategy within a dynamic, globalized economy characterized by intense competition and increasing customer expectations. Effective staff training is an essential component for any company aspiring to achieve success (Dickson, 1992). According to Sukaatmadja et al. (2021), fostering employee development should be integral to a company's core values, with training plans serving as a foundational element. Organizations that overlook this evolving workforce demand risk failure. Some consumer goods companies, however, still view training their sales teams as a cost rather than an investment (Rodrigues & Martins, 2020). Sales training is particularly crucial for companies like LA UNICA, which specialize in the direct sale of beauty products, as their success largely depends on the ability of their advisors to effectively conduct commercial transactions. According to Anderson and Oliver (1987), direct selling involves distributing and marketing products directly to consumers through a purchasing and selling process that typically occurs at the customer's home or in

public spaces (Sudiyati et al., 2024). It is important to note that direct selling represents just one form of sales, and therefore, various types of salespersons exist within the broader sales landscape.

In the direct sales model employed by LA ÚNICA, distribution networks are typically formed through product demonstrations or explanations in informal settings. This approach can be conceptualized as the marketing of goods or services conducted outside the formal premises of the company offering these products (Shin et al., 2021). In such organizations, it is essential to implement customized training programs to enhance efficiency and competitiveness. However, given the inherent scarcity of resources, training efforts are typically targeted towards those individuals who are most likely to value and utilize them effectively (Zhang, 2024). This study investigates which variables or characteristics of the advisors are most relevant for directing training efforts. While previous research, such as Auh and Menguc (2005), has explored correlations between training and factors such as gender, age, or location of sales, recent literature reveals a gap concerning the relationship between sales training and socioeconomic status. This underscores the relevance and novelty of the present research.

Ilyas et al. (2021) define socioeconomic status as a measure of an individual's or household's relative economic and social position within a hierarchical social structure. It reflects a person's social standing within a group, influenced by factors such as income, education, access to healthcare, transportation, and other indicators of well-being (Hertanto, 2023). While socioeconomic status can shape various aspects of life, its direct relationship with comparative advantages in sales performance—compared to individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds—remains an open question, particularly in the context of sales training effectiveness. Another relevant study on the topic of sales training, particularly its planning, is conducted by Schultz and Good (2000). They assert that sales training should not be improvised but must be strategically designed to address deficiencies and enhance sales performance (Setiawati & Roziqin, 2023). This perspective aligns with Yi et al. (2021), who argue that once a company decides to train its employees, it must plan the training meticulously and strategically. This involves focusing on specific variables or sets of

variables, utilizing the most comprehensive empirical evidence available, and clearly defining the skills and capabilities to be developed, the training methods and locations, and the expected outcomes.

An essential aspect of sales training is its quality and management. Not all training programs are equally effective or necessary [Hughes et al. \(2013\)](#) identifies several minimum requirements for sales training to be deemed adequate: a customer-oriented organizational approach, strong leadership from those organizing and directing the training, a focus on process-oriented technical aspects, a commitment to continuous improvement, and an evidence-based approach ([Hair et al., 2013](#)). Developing effective sales training programs is a critical responsibility of a sales manager. Such programs are essential for leveraging human resources, transforming sales staff into successful and productive members of the marketing team, and ultimately enhancing overall team performance ([Al-Abdullatif & Al-Omair, 2024](#)). However, for independent salespeople, there is a lack of uniform criteria or widely accepted standards within the business community. This research aims to address this knowledge gap. Ultimately, this review highlights that, despite significant discussions on the usefulness, effectiveness, planning, and structuring of sales training, there is limited evidence correlating sales training with the variable of "socioeconomic status." Therefore, this research is relevant in exploring this under examined area.

Method

The research initially employs a quantitative approach, utilizing inferential statistics to validate a hypothesis, specifically through the chi-square model. Due to the methodological rigor in defining variables and calculating the sample, the results are robust and can be extrapolated to similar contexts. In the second phase, the research adopts the case study methodology as outlined by ([Plouffe et al., 2009](#)). This approach involves posing multiple questions about the same study object. When the focus is directed solely on the case itself, the objective is to gain in-depth insights into this specific instance, without necessarily addressing broader issues. This approach is referred to as an intrinsic study, where the case is preselected for its inherent interest. Conversely, when the study begins with a general case to explore a particular instance,

the goal is to gain understanding of various aspects from the case, necessitating an instrumental study with multiple research questions (Chalayonnawin et al., 2022).

Hypothesis

Hypothesis Formulation:

Ho. The higher the socioeconomic level of LA UNICA's independent sales consultants, the lower the need for sales training.

Hi. The higher the socioeconomic level of LA UNICA's independent sales consultants, the greater their sales training needs.

Level of Significance:

Maximum degree of error that we are willing to accept if we reject the null hypothesis (Ho). The significance or type I error will be the conventional value of 5% ($\alpha=0.05$).

Test Statistic:

The statistical test to relate qualitative variables in this study was Spearman's Correlation.

Reading of the P-Value:

The error was calculated using SPSS statistical software, resulting in a p-value < 0.001 , which is lower than the significance proposed.

Sample

According to statistics from LA UNICA, the company has approximately 137,000 independent business advisors. To determine the sample size, the finite population formula was used, incorporating a prevalence of 50%, a confidence level of 95%, and a sampling error of 4.17%. This calculation yielded a sample size of 551 independent sales consultants from the cosmetics and hygiene direct sales sector within LA UNICA. The sampling method employed was probabilistic, ensuring each member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. Random selection

was performed by enumerating all members of the population and drawing them according to the sample size until the desired number was achieved (Bui et al., 2022). No exclusion criteria were applied; all independent business advisors within the research sample were considered eligible to participate in the study.

Procedure

The following activities were undertaken for data collection:

1. Authorization was sought from the director of LA UNICA to conduct the survey.
2. Following authorization, the advisors were informed via email about the survey, including details on the deadline and guidelines for its completion.
3. The survey aimed to assess their perceptions regarding the training aspects they value in the cosmetics and hygiene direct sales sector at LA UNICA.
4. The survey was accompanied by a cover letter that outlined the research objective, identified the lead researcher, assured participants of the confidentiality and security of their information, and emphasized that the data would be used solely for academic purposes.
5. After completing the survey, each consultant was instructed to return it via the same channel, adhering to the specified deadline of one week.
6. Upon receipt of all completed surveys, the data were entered into a database using SPSS version 23.
7. Statistical software was utilized for data analysis. Subsequently, quality control measures were implemented, including the identification and correction of errors.
8. Finally, the results were processed and analysed using SPSS version 23 statistical software.

Variables

Variable 1 highlights the dimensions of sales training, academic skills, and soft skills.

Conceptual Definition: Training needs for an organisation's personnel, with the aim of improving each employee's performance.

Operational Definition: A training needs assessment was conducted to identify the business skills of the independent sales consultants at LA UNICA, using a survey

adapted from [Shin et al. \(2021\)](#).

Variable 2 highlights the Socioeconomic Level.

Conceptual definition: Socioeconomic Level refers to an individual's position or status in society based on their economic resources. Operational Definition: It categorizes the social stratum to which an independent sales consultant at LA UNICA belongs as high, medium, or low level.

Information Analysis

After collecting the quantitative data, a database was created using SPSS version 26 statistical software. The variables were categorized and coded, followed by data refinement to ensure consistency. For the descriptive analysis, both absolute and relative frequencies were used to interpret the results from the questionnaire. Quantitative variables were analysed through measures of central tendency and dispersion. The bivariate analysis examined the relationship between the most valued needs of independent business advisors and their socioeconomic status. The "Chi-Square" test for independent samples was employed, with a significance level set at 5%. A p-value of <0.05 was considered significant. The choice of the "Chi-Square" test for independent samples was based on its suitability for correlational hypotheses, as it evaluates the strength of the relationship between two independent variables according to the research data.

Research Questions about the Study Object

General

What is the relationship between the socioeconomic level of the independent sales consultants at LA UNICA and their training needs?

Specific

1. What are the specific training needs of independent sales consultants based on their socioeconomic level?

2. What is the amount that independent sales consultants are willing to invest in their professional training?
3. What is the current level of preparation, as self-reported by independent sales consultants?
4. In which areas would training be most beneficial for independent sales consultants?
5. What is the level of training that independent sales consultants have previously received?

Results

This research successfully met its objectives and tested the study hypotheses through rigorous data collection, followed by thorough data processing and analysis to avoid logical interpretation errors. The results from the survey of LA UNICA's independent sales consultants reveal the following: Referring to [Table 1](#), since the p-value is < 0.001 , we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) in favour of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This indicates, with a 95% confidence level, that there is a significant correlation between training needs and the socioeconomic status of the independent sales consultants. In other words, consultants with higher socioeconomic status generally demonstrate greater training needs. Specifically, 59.6% of consultants with a medium socioeconomic status and 34.0% of those with a high socioeconomic status report substantial training requirement.

Table 1: Sales Training Needs by Socioeconomic Level of LA UNICA's Independent Sales Consultants.

Socioeconomic Level	Training Needs						p*
	High		Regular		Download		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
High	80	34.0%	80	44.0%	46	34.3%	<0.001
Medium	140	59.6%	75	41.2%	30	22.4%	
Under	15	6.4%	27	14.8%	58	43.3%	
Total	235	100.0%	182	100.0%	134	100.0%	

(*) Spearman's Correlation Test

Additional relevant data from the research are presented in [Table 2](#). The findings reveal that nearly half of the consultants (48.6%) consider that a suitable and affordable fee for 4 or 5 courses should be less than 50 soles. Additionally, 32.5% of consultants believe the cost should fall between 51 and 100 soles, 14.9% think it should be between 101 and 200 soles, and only 4% believe the cost should exceed 200 soles.

Table 2: Amount of Money that LA UNICA's Independent Business Advisors Would be Willing to Pay

Cost	N	%
0 to 50 soles	268	48.6%
51 to 100 soles	179	32.5%
101 to 200 soles	82	14.9%
More than 200 soles	22	4.0%
Total	551	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

Further investigation into the potential course costs that LA UNICA's independent sales consultants might be willing to pay revealed their responses regarding the maximum price they would consider for 3 or 4 courses, even if it were relatively high. These responses are detailed in [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Amount of Money that LA UNICA's Independent Business Advisors Consider High, But Which They Would Still be Willing to Pay.

Cost	N	%
0 to 50 soles	133	24.1%
51 to 100 soles	158	28.7%
101 to 200 soles	154	27.9%
More than 200 soles	106	19.2%
Total	551	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding training costs, [Table 4](#) provides an overview of the maximum amount of money that LA UNICA's independent sales consultants are willing to pay for their training programs. This table outlines the highest financial threshold that consultants are comfortable with, reflecting their willingness to invest in high-quality training without exceeding their budgetary limits. It captures the upper bound of training expenditure, offering insights into the price point at which consultants would consider the cost acceptable.

Table 4: Excessive Amount of Money, Not Affordable for the Independent Commercial Advisors of LA UNICA

Cost	N	%
0 to 50 Soles	74	13.4%
51 to 100 Soles	127	23.0%
101 to 200 Soles	142	25.8%
More than 200 Soles	208	37.7%
Total	551	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

In contrast, Table 5 depicts the lower threshold for training costs. This table illustrates the minimum amount that consultants might be willing to spend on training, which is essential to understand to avoid pricing the training programs too low. A price point set too low could be perceived as a reflection of substandard quality, potentially deterring consultants from enrolling in the training. The lower threshold represents the minimum expenditure acceptable for 3 or 4 training courses, ensuring that the perceived value of the training remains positive and aligns with expectations of quality.

Table 5: Minimum Amount of Money that LA UNICA's Independent Business Advisors Would be Willing to Pay.

Cost	N	%
0 to 50 soles	461	83.7%
51 to 100 soles	65	11.8%
101 to 200 soles	20	3.6%
More than 200 soles	5	0.9%
Total	551	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

The rationale behind the price expectations of LA ÚNICA's independent sales consultants is not only due to their limited budgets but also stems from their belief that the company should subsidize the cost of training. Given that the consultants share in the final profit, they view the training fee as "symbolic," intended to cover minor expenses such as administration or stationery. This approach is intended to enhance their commitment to attending all training sessions. Regarding their self-assessment of preparedness, 40% of LA ÚNICA's independent consultants felt somewhat prepared, another 40% felt adequately prepared, 15% felt very prepared, and 3% felt entirely unprepared. Only 2% considered themselves experts. Although

many consultants feel unprepared for the challenges of selling catalogue products, their hands-on experience and effort have led over half to rate themselves as proficient or highly skilled. Nonetheless, a significant portion – over 40% – perceives themselves as mediocre or poor salespeople, as depicted in [Figure 1](#).

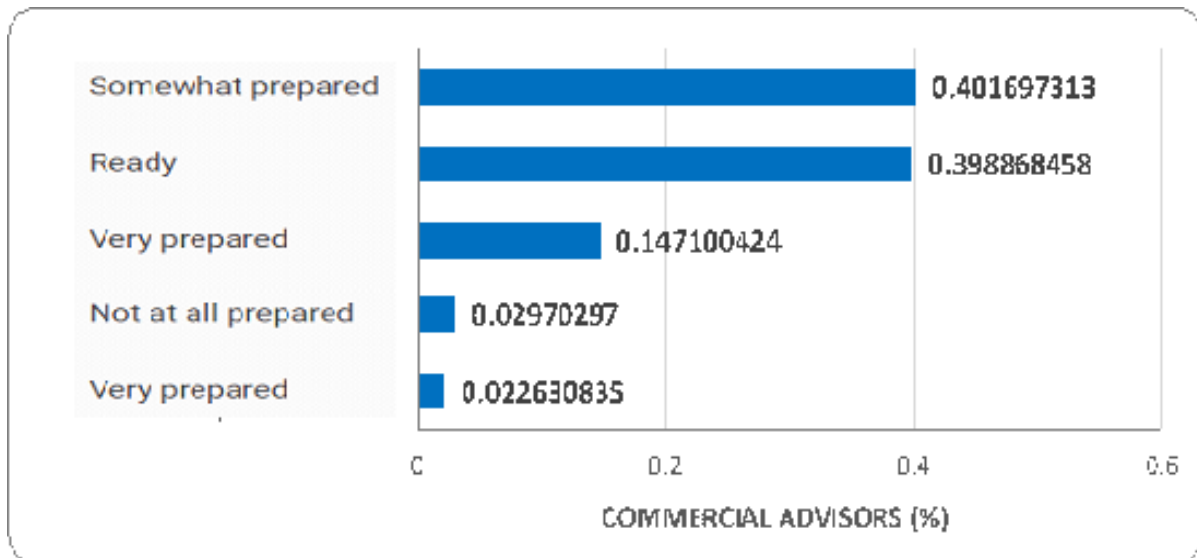


Figure 1: Level of Preparation as Self-Perception of the Independent Sales Consultants of LA UNICA Company

In evaluating the training provided by LA ÚNICA, most consultants consider it adequate. However, 40% of respondents perceive the training offerings as either sparse or inadequate. This highlights a significant demand for more comprehensive training in areas relevant to catalogue sales. Such training should extend beyond product knowledge to include academic topics and soft skills crucial for success in this field. Interestingly, based on their experiences, many consultants intuitively believe that possessing these skills is not essential for starting or establishing their independent ventures (see [Figure 2](#)).

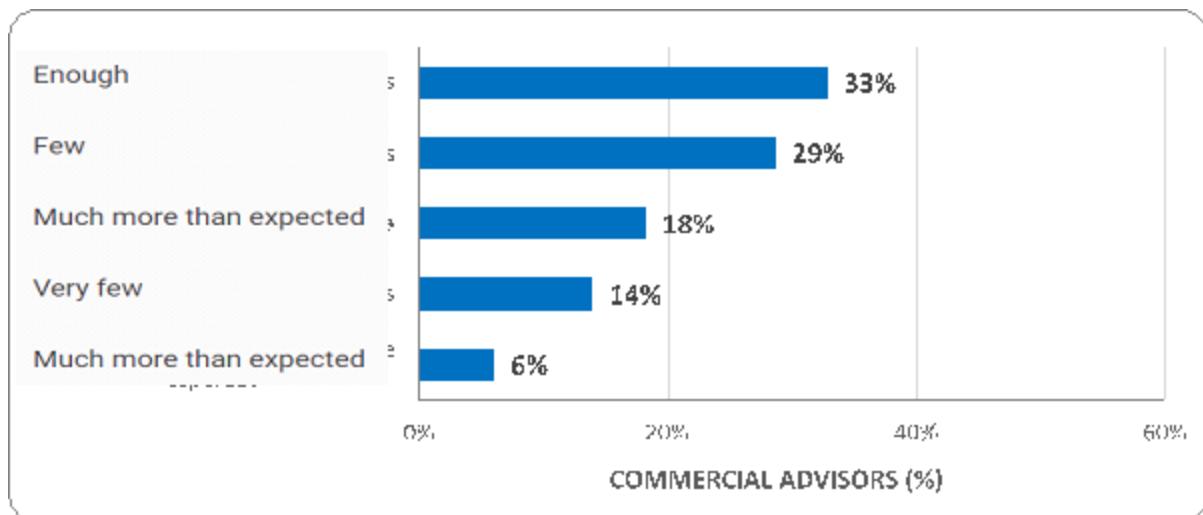


Figure 2: Evaluation of the Training Received by the Independent Commercial Advisors from LA UNICA.

Finally, LA ÚNICA's independent consultants identified the skills they consider most critical and would like to receive training in. The most frequently cited area is customer relations, with 41% of respondents prioritizing it. This is closely followed by sales techniques, which garnered 39% of the responses. Training on using technology to enhance sales ranks third, with 35%. While other areas of training were also mentioned, they received less emphasis compared to these key skills.

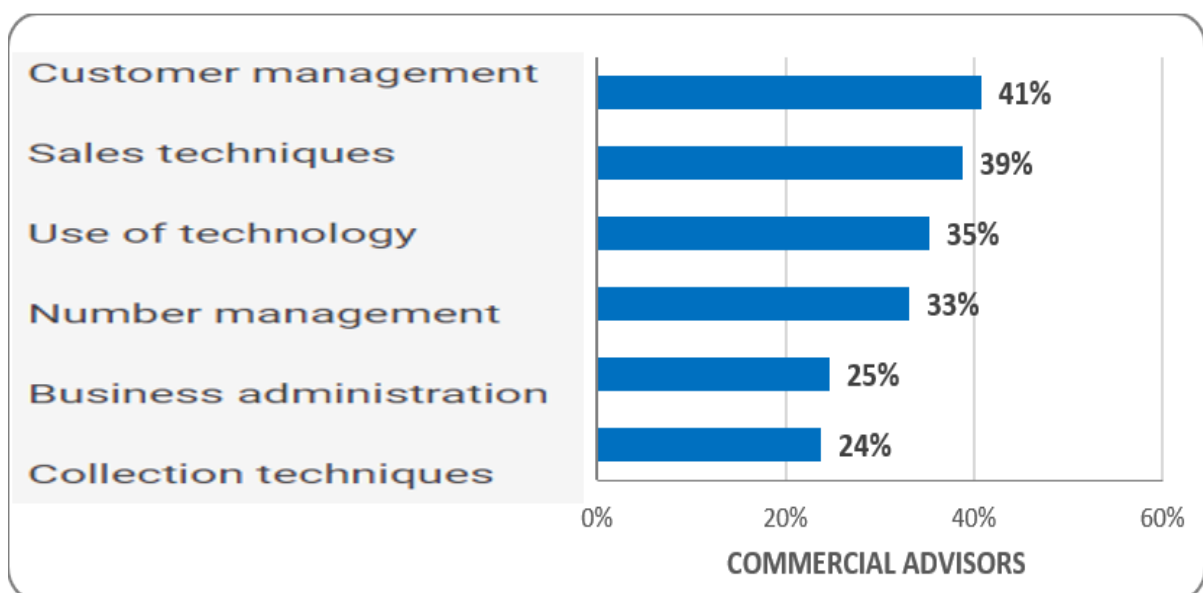


Figure 3: Correlation between Socioeconomic Status and Training Requirements

Discussion

The research utilized a quantitative approach with a sample of 551 independent

business advisors. A probabilistic sampling method was employed, ensuring that the results are generalizable to the broader population of independent advisors at LA ÚNICA. The study used a validated and adapted instrument, based on the framework established by [Rodrigues and Martins \(2020\)](#), to assess the training needs of the operational sales staff. The research revealed a significant correlation between training needs and the socioeconomic status of independent sales consultants ($p < 0.001$). Contrary to expectations, consultants with higher socioeconomic status reported greater training needs compared to those with lower statuses. This suggests that higher socioeconomic status, which often provides advantages like better education, travel, healthcare, and learning opportunities, does not necessarily translate to superior sales skills ([Siregar, 2022](#)). This finding indicates that the anticipated benefits of a higher socioeconomic position may not be as impactful on sales performance as previously assumed.

The unexpected findings might indicate that independent business advisors could have misperceived their own socioeconomic status or deliberately classified themselves differently. However, this misperception alone might not fully account for the inverse correlation observed, suggesting other underlying factors could be influencing the discrepancy between socioeconomic status and perceived training needs. This interpretation suggests that the perceived socioeconomic differences might not be substantial enough to impact training needs significantly. Independent sales consultants might be classified as high status more out of aspiration than reality, while those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have developed their skills more through necessity. Consequently, their practical experience could reduce their perceived need for additional training, aligning with the study's findings ([Balázs et al., 2022](#)). Indeed, lower socioeconomic status advisors might leverage their networks effectively, enhancing their sales through strong personal connections ([Kumar et al., 2022](#)). Despite the training provided by LA ÚNICA being free, advisors' minimal financial valuation of external courses suggests that they perceive training costs as symbolic rather than substantial, reflecting their broader financial constraints and perceived value of the training. This observation may warrant particular interpretations.

Firstly, while independent sales consultants are categorized under direct sales, they possess a unique profile distinct from other professional salespeople with specialized academic qualifications. Therefore, it is important not to conflate or merge the roles of full-time, academically qualified sales professionals with those of independent sales consultants. Secondly, many independent business advisors are also full-time mothers and wives, leading lives that are both busy and highly social. As a result, professional development may not be their primary focus but rather a secondary consideration to their family responsibilities. Thirdly, there may be a perception among independent business advisors that the return on investment from educational expenditures does not align with their potential earnings, which may be less significant compared to other full-time careers. Given these insights, it would be advisable for LA UNICA to prioritize its training programs for consultants in the medium and high socioeconomic segments before addressing those in the lower segment. Despite the relatively low capital requirement of direct sales models, investment in training remains crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage in the market. A potential risk for LA UNICA is the turnover and loss of investment associated with covering the full cost of training. As noted by [Wachner et al. \(2009\)](#), key drawbacks of the sales system include high maintenance costs, substantial turnover among independent sales consultants, significant inventory expenses, and the lack of immediate product availability, among other issues. Additionally, LA UNICA must consider the implications of mandating training. [Ilyas et al. \(2021\)](#) argues that selling is more than just a profession; it is a lifestyle. Imposing formal training requirements might disrupt an activity that, despite requiring substantial commitment and professionalism, often serves as a secondary pursuit for many independent consultants. Consequently, enforcing such training could potentially create undue strain and stress, undermining the effectiveness of the initiative.

To advance the professional expertise of its sales team, selecting appropriate training modules for independent sales consultants is crucial. The survey responses from consultants highlight a prioritization of topics such as customer engagement, sales techniques, and the use of technology. However, several important considerations warrant further examination. Firstly, it is essential to assess whether

these identified areas comprehensively address the consultants' needs or if there are critical topics not covered in the survey that could be significant. Secondly, the genuine interest of consultants in these training topics should be evaluated, as their responses may not always reflect a thorough self-assessment of their professional development. Thirdly, regardless of the survey results, it is reasonable to argue that training should primarily focus on enhancing sales techniques. Effective sales strategies must continually evolve to keep pace with changing trends and technologies. Although skills remain crucial, they must be continually reinforced. The dynamic nature of independent sales, particularly in the Peruvian market, underscores the need for targeted training to address high turnover rates and inadequate preparation among sales personnel (Schultz & Good, 2000). In conclusion, following the framework outlined by Yi et al. (2021), LA UNICA should adopt a systematic four-phase approach to optimize their training initiatives. This approach includes: 1) needs assessment, to identify the specific training requirements; 2) program design, to develop targeted training solutions; 3) implementation, to deliver the training effectively; and 4) evaluation, to assess the impact and effectiveness of the training program. This structured approach ensures that the training not only addresses individual development needs but also aligns with organizational goals, thereby enhancing overall performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research revealed that the training needs of LA UNICA's independent sales consultants are inversely related to their socioeconomic status, contrary to initial expectations. These needs encompass both academic skills, such as customer management, sales techniques, and technological proficiency, as well as essential soft skills including communication, negotiation, and time management. Despite many consultants rating themselves as proficient, a notable gap in training persists. It is promising that there is a clear motivation among consultants to advance not only in role-specific tasks but also in personal development areas such as social engagement, leadership, and emotional intelligence. For immediate action, LA UNICA should customize its training program to address the needs of mid- to high-level independent

consultants, ensuring alignment with both performance metrics and their genuine interests. Initiating a pilot training program with a select group of consultants could provide valuable insights. Their feedback and performance outcomes should be evaluated to make necessary adjustments before rolling out the program more broadly.

The study's limitations include the lack of detailed demographic analysis, which could have provided more specific insights. Most of the business consultants are aged between 18 and 50, come from diverse communities, and hold varied social backgrounds and beliefs. These factors may influence the correlational analysis, resulting in observations that are more nuanced rather than generalizable. Additionally, the research faced challenges due to the limited literature available on sales training in relation to the socioeconomic and cultural levels of salespeople. This scarcity necessitated an extensive exploration of various methodological approaches to uncover the truth and address the research question effectively. Future research could focus on a detailed analysis of the sociodemographic profiles of sales consultants to gain deeper insights into their educational backgrounds and its impact on training needs. Additionally, the role of technology as a facilitator for sales consultants warrants further exploration to understand how technological advancements influence sales effectiveness and training. Comparative studies examining the socioeconomic levels of sales professionals with varying profiles and juxtaposing these findings with those from LA UNICA's independent sales consultants, would also enrich the understanding of how socioeconomic factors shape training needs and performance.

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