



# **Evolving with Artificial Intelligence: The Changing Landscape of Strategic Marketing**

Empirical Inductive Analysis of the Impact of Artificial  
Intelligence on Strategic Marketing

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## ABSTRACT

**Title:** Evolving with Artificial Intelligence: The Changing Landscape of Strategic Marketing

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This thesis delves into the rapidly evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in strategic marketing. It identifies and investigates the transformative potential of AI, its current limitations, the necessary human skills, and challenges that accompany its adoption.

Through 16 in-depth, qualitative interviews, several key findings were derived. AI is acknowledged as a powerful tool in strategic marketing, however, there are inherent limitations, such as the lack of real-time contextual awareness, that hinder its full utilization in strategic marketing. Further, AI's dual impact on marketing operations and creativity is highlighted. It streamlines routine tasks and is freeing marketers to engage more in creative work and strategic thinking. Despite the efficiency of AI in data analysis and task automation, the results of this study suggest it cannot replace the human ability to understand and connect emotionally with customers. This insight emphasizes the importance of the human touch in marketing, with AI serving as a supportive tool rather than a replacement. The future of strategic marketing, therefore, lies not in choosing between humans and AI but in integrating the strengths of both for maximum benefit.

Technological constraints and change management are identified as key challenges in AI implementation where transparent top-down communication and quality data are crucial for successful AI integration. This research further underscores the urgent need for AI-focused education for marketing professionals to bridge the knowledge gap and facilitate effective AI adoption. It finally highlights the ethical and regulatory challenges associated with AI deployment, including data privacy, bias, and accountability.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Marketing, Strategy, AI Implementation, AI-Human Collaboration, Evolution of Marketing Role

## SUMÁRIO

**Título:** Evoluir com a Inteligência Artificial: O cenário em mudança do marketing estratégico

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Esta tese analisa a rápida evolução da relevância da Inteligência Artificial (IA) no marketing estratégico. Este estudo identifica e investiga o potencial transformador da IA, as suas limitações actuais, as competências humanas necessárias e as considerações éticas que acompanham a sua adopção. A IA é reconhecida como uma ferramenta poderosa no marketing estratégico, no entanto, existem limitações inerentes, como a falta de consciência contextual em tempo real, que impedem a sua plena utilização no marketing estratégico.

Apesar da eficiência da IA na análise de dados e na automatização de tarefas, A IA não deverá substituir a capacidade humana de compreender e de se ligar emocionalmente aos clientes. Esta visão enfatiza a importância do toque humano no marketing, com a IA a servir como uma ferramenta de apoio e não como um substituto. O futuro do marketing estratégico, por conseguinte, não reside na escolha entre humanos e IA, mas na integração dos pontos fortes de ambos para obter o máximo benefício.

As restrições tecnológicas e a gestão da mudança são identificadas como os principais desafios na implementação da IA. Neste contexto, uma comunicação transparente do topo para a base e dados de qualidade são cruciais para uma integração bem-sucedida da IA. Esta investigação sublinha ainda a necessidade urgente de formação centrada na IA para os profissionais de marketing, a fim de colmatar a lacuna de conhecimentos e facilitar a adopção eficaz da IA.

**Palavras-chave:** Inteligência Artificial, Marketing, Estratégia, Implementação da IA, Colaboração IA-Homem, Evolução das Funções de Marketing

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AI-CRM	Artificial Intelligence-Customer Relationship Management
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
IoT	Internet of Things
LDA	Latent Dirichlet Allocation
LLM	Large Language Model
NLG	Natural Language Generation
NLP	Natural Language Processing

# 1. INTRODUCTION

“AI will not replace you. A person using AI will.”

@svpino via twitter on Jan 5, 2023, 1:00 pm

This citation stems from a viral tweet from Santiago Valdarrama, a machine learning engineer with over two decades of experience in scaling and building enterprise software. This thought-provoking statement garnered over forty thousand likes on the social media platform Twitter and reflects the growing awareness and impact of AI integration in various industries.

In recent years AI has attracted significant investments to enhance operations within companies, with analysts suggesting that AI could contribute an additional \$13 trillion per year to the global economic output by 2030 (Bughin, Brussels, Seong, et al., 2018). The marketing domain is also experiencing the transformative effects of AI: 72% of marketers view AI as a business advantage due to lower costs, more diverse service channels, improved innovative capabilities, and expanded human creativity (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019). As AI revolutionizes marketing, research interest in the field has grown rapidly, with studies exploring AI applications such as prompting intelligent technology (Marinova et al., 2017), understanding AI-powered robotics (Davenport et al., 2020), and investigating AI-enabled workplaces (Chui et al., 2015). Despite extensive conceptual research, there is still a lack of clear understanding on how AI technologies in marketing have been applied in companies today and how they should be applied in the future (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019; Paschen et al., 2019).

AI has emerged as a transformative force across various industries, and marketing is no exception. The rapid advancements in AI technology have opened up new possibilities for organizations to develop innovative marketing strategies that align with the ever-changing consumer landscape (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019). Despite the growing interest in AI applications within marketing, there remains a significant gap in understanding the current state of AI implementation in organizations and how AI is being integrated into marketing strategies. Moreover, AI's role in shaping the future of strategic marketing and the implications for the job roles of strategic marketers are under-researched areas. This thesis aims to address these gaps by exploring the impact of AI in strategic marketing, shedding light on the opportunities and challenges that AI presents in shaping marketing efforts in today's competitive business environment and understanding how the job role of a strategic marketer will evolve with the advanced usage of AI within the industry.

The adoption of AI in marketing has the potential to revolutionize the way organizations approach strategy development, execution, and analysis. AI-powered tools and techniques can facilitate the efficient processing of vast amounts of data, enabling marketers to better

understand consumer behavior, preferences, and expectations. This, in turn, allows organizations to develop more targeted and personalized marketing strategies, enhancing customer engagement and ultimately driving business growth (Paschen et al., 2019). However, the integration of AI in marketing also brings a set of challenges, including concerns related to data privacy, ethical considerations, and the need for organizations to develop the necessary skill sets in professionals to effectively leverage AI-driven marketing strategies (Davenport et al., 2020).

This research focuses on understanding the practical impact AI technology has on the area of strategic marketing today and what factors foster or challenge implementation of AI in organizations, therefore contributing to the growing body of literature in this area. In light of the described developments, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

- *How is AI affecting strategic marketing and what are the challenges for marketers in the future?*

This dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on AI in marketing and follows the structure of an academic research thesis.

The first section of this research reviews existing literature on key areas relevant to the research question, starting with the definition of AI concepts in the context of marketing. The review also covers the capabilities and research on AI implementation in the diverse field of marketing. Following the framework of marketing topics in the literature (Mustak et al., 2021), the literature review examines two primary areas of research in marketing AI implementation: customer-related and strategy-related. The review concludes by outlining the current implementation challenges and presenting research on the changing work environment due to AI implementation.

In a second section, this dissertation explains the research methodology, providing clarity on data collection, sampling strategy, and interview protocol, while elaborating on the chosen research method. The collected data was thoroughly analyzed using the systematic Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013) in the form of a content analysis to offer a comprehensive understanding of the results from expert interviews.

Thirdly, the interview results are presented in the Results section and later discussed by connecting the insights to the revised literature. In this section, research limitations, managerial relevance, theoretical contributions, and potential future research areas are identified. To conclude, the final part of this research presents key statements and a take-away message.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the dissertation delivers a comprehensive literature review of current relevant topics of AI in marketing to inform and guide the development of new research. More specifically, definitions and explanations of relevant theories and frameworks on the key topics of AI, Marketing, implementation of AI in diverse marketing areas, challenges of AI implementation and workforce implications of AI implementation will be presented with the aim to provide a sound understanding of the literature related to the research field. This section involves critically reviewing and synthesizing the relevant literature to identify research gaps and inconsistencies and to contextualize this research within the broader field of this study to demonstrate its significance and novelty.

### 2.1 Definition of AI concepts in marketing

AI is defined as software and algorithms that facilitate or perform tasks previously requiring human cognitive abilities (De Bruyn et al., 2020; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019; Huang & Rust, 2018; Kumar et al., 2019). As an umbrella term in marketing research, AI encompasses multiple task types (Mustak et al., 2021) and imitates human minds through neural networks, interpreting its environment and acting accordingly (Verma et al., 2021).

Machine learning is an application of AI that allows systems to learn and improve from experience without explicit programming (Campbell et al., 2020) and deep learning is a neural network form that develops understanding by building progressively more abstract representations of a dataset (Campbell et al., 2020). Defining AI, machine learning and deep learning is crucial for this study, as these technologies significantly impact the marketing industry and to clarify the scope and focus of AI applications explored further along in this research.

Finally, this thesis, defines marketing according to the American Marketing Association (2017) as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. This definition ensures a common ground for understanding marketing activities and processes, enhancing the relevance and applicability of this research for marketers and businesses.

### 2.2 Benefits and challenges of AI in marketing

The nature of marketing is ever evolving, and AI has an increasing impact in forming its applications (Stone et al., 2020). Driven by limitations in traditional marketing practices and external pressures resulting from informatization, the adoption of AI in marketing has led to various benefits and challenges (Chen et al., 2022). As companies strive to deliver outstanding

customer experiences in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, AI technology and predictive analytics have emerged as essential tools in understanding end-user experiences and offering insights across all functional areas (Verma et al., 2021). The impact of AI on strategic marketing is multifaceted, offering both advantages and challenges.

The integration of AI into marketing activities has resulted in numerous benefits, including improved efficiency and accuracy, enhanced decision-making, strengthened customer relationships, increased sales, and reduced risk and costs (Chen et al., 2022). By leveraging AI, organizations can better understand their customers and anticipate their needs, leading to more personalized and effective marketing strategies (Verma et al., 2021).

Despite the numerous benefits associated with AI adoption in marketing, several challenges arise. These include ensuring data privacy and security, addressing ethical concerns, overcoming technological limitations, and navigating complex regulatory landscapes (De Bruyn et al., 2020). By understanding and addressing these complexities, organizations can harness the full potential of AI to transform their marketing strategies and foster lasting customer relationships (De Bruyn et al., 2020). Research on the business value and use of AI in organizations remains limited. However, some studies have identified challenges and obstacles in AI deployment (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021). The most significant factor inhibiting companies from deriving value from AI is a lack of technological competence, with nearly one in five organizations struggling to understand the necessary data requirements and technological infrastructure for successful AI implementation (Ransbotham et al., 2017). Moreover, integrating AI projects with existing processes and systems poses a considerable challenge (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

AI algorithms' limitations, including the absence of emotions, understanding, consciousness, and common sense, further complicate matters. This means that AI cannot adhere to unspoken rules universally understood by humans, making the specification of objective functions, such as rewards or penalties, particularly difficult during AI implementation (De Bruyn et al., 2020). Organizations seeking to excel in the competitive landscape of the Fourth Industrial Revolution must carefully consider these factors and implement AI solutions that align with their goals and objectives (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

The diverse applications of AI across marketing functions, as showcased by recent research, are playing a transformative role in customer relationship management, product recommendations, pricing, marketing data analysis, and personalized services (Chen et al., 2022). The use of AI in marketing is seen to be particularly influential in two primary components: customer-related research and strategy-related research (Mustak et al., 2021).

### ***2.2.1 Customer-related research of AI in marketing***

Customer-related research, which encompasses aspects such as customer segmentation, customer experience, and customer relationship management (Homburg et al., 2015; Kumar & Reinartz, 2006; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), has seen a significant influx of AI applications. By leveraging AI, marketers can automate repetitive tasks, improving efficiency in customer-related marketing use-cases, ranging from enhancing customer segmentation to enabling advanced customer analytics (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

In this context, AI becomes an essential tool for understanding consumer sentiments. It facilitates data mining and AI-driven marketing analytics, thereby uncovering underlying patterns in customer data (Wedel et al., 2016; Trusov et al., 2016; Simester et al., 2020; Bag et al., 2021; Wang & Hong, 2006). This valuable information is then used to create targeted marketing campaigns, tailor products, and improve personalization (H. Zhang et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2022; Epsilon, 2018; Kumar et al., 2019; Li & Kannan, 2014; Huang & Rust, 2018). Moreover, AI's role extends beyond analytics to the revolutionization of content creation through Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Natural Language Generation (NLG) (Huang & Rust, 2018). It also enhances customer relationships, as seen in the successful integration of Internet of Things (IoT) solutions with relationship marketing (Lo & Campos, 2018). The appearance of AI-enhanced customer relationship management (AI-CRM) has resulted in better customer lifetime value predictions and prioritization (Libai et al., 2020), while AI-enabled chatbots and electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) analysis contribute to improved customer experiences (Nguyen & Sidorova, 2018; Abrahams et al., 2013; Tang & Guo, 2015).

AI's role also extends to the analysis of customer satisfaction and attitudes towards products, as well as measuring the effects of different marketing campaigns (Baumann et al., 2012; Ansari & Riasi, 2016; Lau et al., 2015; Ballestar et al., 2019). AI-driven decision support models and recommendation-driven digital marketing strategies foster consumer loyalty towards brands (Chen et al., 2022). Furthermore, AI's utility is demonstrated in its ability to mitigate churn, with AI-powered intelligent agents able to identify customers with a high risk of churn (Gordini & Veglio, 2017; Jahromi et al., 2014).

The exploration of these diverse use-cases underlines the significant value AI brings to customer-related marketing activities.

### ***2.2.2 Strategy-related research of AI in marketing***

AI is making significant advancements in the area of strategic marketing tasks and is reshaping the interface between humans and computers in management from the operational to strategic domain (Stone et al., 2020). For instance, AI aids marketers in identifying

opportunities through the analysis of unstructured data, discerning cause-and-effect relationships within large datasets, and detecting patterns (Campbell et al., 2020). The benefits of AI in strategic marketing extend to enhancing decision-making speed, identifying missing data, diminishing bias in decision-making, and overall better managing marketing projects (Stone et al., 2020).

Despite these advancements, the impact of AI on strategic decision-making remains an under-explored area (Stone et al., 2020). The majority of existing literature focuses on specific use-cases, which is typical for emerging research fields. As an illustration, a study by Lappas et al. (2016) delved into the effect of fake reviews on online visibility for hotels, emphasizing the critical role of AI-driven consumer insights in detecting and mitigating fake reviews in strategic decision-making. Further, McAfee & Brynjolfsson (2012) underscored how AI-driven consumer insights derived from big data can inform strategic decisions and foster competitiveness in the marketplace.

AI's potential is also evident in the *optimization of the marketing mix*, a cornerstone of strategic decision-making. Li & Kannan (2014) proposed an empirical model for attributing conversions in a multichannel online marketing environment, showcasing AI's promise in assisting marketers. Ching et al. (2013) further assessed the advancements of AI learning models in marketing and their potential in optimizing the marketing mix and overall marketing effectiveness. A model developed by Rutz et al. (2011) for analyzing the indirect effects of paid search advertising on future website visits highlights the potential of AI in refining keyword selections and bidding strategies.

Moreover, AI can be employed in *market trend analysis*, a critical aspect of strategic marketing, to assist companies in comprehending market dynamics and identifying opportunities (Asur & Huberman, 2010). For instance, AI can analyze both the organization's current and future environment, including the macroenvironmental factors that influence its marketing and stakeholders (Campbell et al., 2020). Preis et al. (2013) demonstrated this by examining the digital traces of Hurricane Sandy on Flickr, implying the applicability of AI-driven analysis for forecasting and understanding market trends. AI-driven social media analytics have also proven superior to traditional market-based predictors in forecasting real-world outcomes (Asur & Huberman, 2010). Vargo et al. (2018) further emphasized the need for leveraging AI to analyze and monitor the online media landscape, including fake news, to understand market trends and formulate effective marketing strategies.

Additionally, AI's influence in strategic marketing encompasses social media analytics for *brand strategy development*. Social media platforms provide companies with direct

engagement opportunities with their target audience and enhance brand awareness (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For instance, Tirunillai & Tellis (2014) introduced an AI-driven technique, named "Latent Dirichlet Allocation," (LDA) to mine marketing meaning from online chatter, assisting marketers in analyzing online discussions and formulating data-driven brand strategies. Stephen & Galak (2012) and Luo & Zhang (2013) also demonstrated the positive impact of AI-driven social media analytics on firm value and marketing effectiveness. Tirunillai & Tellis (2014) further explored AI's role in brand management, showcasing how user-generated online content can be harnessed for dynamic analyses to craft competitive brand positions.

Current research in strategy-related use-cases might be limited, but the value of AI-driven consumer insights, social media analytics, and market trend analysis is unmistakable. These AI capabilities provide marketers with valuable information, enabling them to make more informed decisions and by leveraging AI in various aspects of strategic marketing, marketers can improve their understanding of their target audience, reduce biases, increase the speed and quality of decision-making, and ultimately create more competitive and effective marketing strategies. The examples provided, from AI-driven detection of fake reviews to the analysis of online discussions for data-driven brand strategies, serve as compelling illustrations of the transformative potential of AI in strategic marketing.

As the frontier between humans and computers continues to evolve towards strategic management, the need for marketers to recognize and seize the potential of AI becomes increasingly important. This is especially crucial in the face of an ever-competitive marketplace, where the adoption and successful application of AI can provide a significant competitive edge. Thus, the future of strategic marketing appears to be closely related with the advancements in AI technology, promising a landscape of innovation and strategic depth in the field.

### **2.3 Evolution of marketing roles**

The implications of AI in customer-related and strategic marketing, discussed in prior sections, have encouraged a profound evolution in marketing roles. This transformation, as Davenport et al. (2020) suggest, is multifaceted, affecting various aspects of the workforce, such as the required skillsets, the structure of employment, and the interaction between AI and human work.

Job displacement due to AI-driven automation has been a point of concern, with some projections estimating that as many as 35% to 47% of jobs could be at risk over the next two decades (Wakefield, 2016; Bregman, 2017). This shift is expected to affect low-skilled workers the most, while simultaneously increasing competition for high-skilled employees (Bughin,

Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018). The landscape of job postings related to AI shows a wage premium of around 16% (Alekseeva et al., 2021), and the demand for skills such as technology management, emotional intelligence, creativity, and social interaction is on the rise (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019). Conversely, the need for basic cognitive skills and manual labor is predicted to decline (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018).

In response to this transformative wave, organizations need to undergo significant structural changes to remain competitive (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018). More than 3,000 business leaders highlight the importance of continuous learning, cross-functional and team-based work, and the redefinition of job requirements in the era of AI (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018). In this endeavor, it is crucial to foster collaboration among different stakeholders, government bodies, and educators, to reshape educational programs and align them with the changing needs of the industry (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018).

As for marketing professionals, proactivity is the key to staying relevant in this evolving landscape. The need for continuous learning and skill development is of utmost importance, and creativity remains a highly valued skill, even with the increasing prevalence of AI in marketing (Mesquita et al., 2019; Ameen et al., 2022). While AI has made significant strides, human creative expertise still outperforms AI in areas such as logo design (Weingarten et al., 2020). Furthermore, a synergetic relationship between AI and human creativity can significantly enhance performance and foster creativity in marketing roles (Vakratsas & Wang, 2020; Prentice & Nguyen, 2020; Davenport et al., 2020).

A framework proposed by Shrestha et al. (2019) envisions four possible collaborations between AI and humans. These collaborations range from full delegation from humans to AI to aggregated decision-making involving both. The choice of collaboration depends on factors such as decision specificity, reasoning, alternative size, speed, and replicability. In the short to medium term, AI could function as a controller of numerical or all types of data, leveraging machine learning and deep learning neural networks for tasks such as AI-driven pricing strategies and lead identification (Davenport et al., 2020). These collaborations could have varying levels of AI involvement, from functioning as a controller of numerical data or all types of data in the short term, to emerging as data virtuosos and robot experts with advanced predictive capabilities in the longer term (Davenport et al., 2020).

Further, organizations will need to focus on redefining job roles and expectations, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and encouraging cross-functional, team-based work. However, the success of these efforts will depend on robust collaboration between stakeholders, government bodies, and educational institutions (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018).

Despite the wealth of literature highlighting the impact of AI on the marketing industry, there remains a notable lack of research specifically focusing on how the job role of a strategic marketer changes with the integration of AI. Furthermore, the current ‘practical’ environment, including the tangible changes on the ground in marketing roles and workflows due to AI integration, is also underexplored, indicating a need for further study to provide insights into real-world applications and adaptations.

### 3. METHODS

For the purpose of this dissertation, research is understood as “the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in order to understand a phenomenon” and is not mistaken for gathering information and documenting facts (Leedy et al., 2010).

This dissertation utilizes a qualitative research method, which is designed to study “human experiences and realities from the subject’s perspective” and is usually described as an iterative process where the insights often emerge after the data collection (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006, p.16). As new difficulties, opportunities, and market configurations emerge, it is vital to employ open and interpretive research techniques to acquire new knowledge (Mick et al., 2004). Hence, this qualitative study design is flexible and responsive when conditions change as the study progresses (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006). In its nature, qualitative research focuses on understanding people’s beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions, and is recognized for the ability to add new dimensions of understanding and insights to studies (Pathak et al., 2013). The qualitative research method fits the purpose of this dissertation as this study primarily aims to create an understanding of the status-quo of AI implementation in strategic marketing within organizations and to uncover the underlying insights, motives, opportunities, and problems in context of the changing workforce. This is coherent with the widely accepted definition of qualitative research, which describes a holistic research approach that involves discovery and enables the researcher to develop a high level of detail from insights with high involvement in the actual experience (Williams, 2007).

More specifically, this research makes use of qualitative description, which is often applied when the aim of the research is to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the research topic, supporting the goal of this dissertation (Neergaard et al., 2009). Qualitative description is particularly suited for this dissertation for several reasons. First, qualitative description requires collecting data through methods such as interviews, observations, or the analysis of documents and subsequently a data analysis enabled through a thematic, content

or discourse analysis. The aim is to identify key themes and patterns in the data, which can be utilized to describe the phenomenon under investigation (Sandelowski, 2000). Second, in comparison to other qualitative research methods, qualitative description usually does not involve a theory-driven approach, but instead relies on a straight-forward and accessible approach to generate an informative description of the research topic (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). Third, some key features of qualitative description are its flexibility, rich description, minimal interpretation, and its inductive analysis, and hence fitting for this research (Williams, 2007). Fourth, it is a versatile approach and can be applied in various settings, which makes it a suitable approach for a wide range of research topics, while at the same time providing an accurate description and staying close to the participants' voices by minimizing own interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000). Fifth, given that qualitative description relies on an inductive analysis, key topics are derived from actual data rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical theories or frameworks (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). This ensures staying close to the collected data and adds credibility to this study. Sixth, qualitative description is a useful method for researchers interested in exploring a particular topic in depth, especially where there is limited existing knowledge and situations where research wants to identify new areas for further research (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). Finally, qualitative description is a recommended study approach when researchers have limited funds or time to derive insights (Turale, 2020).

While acknowledging the many benefits of this method, it is also important to consider some risks like oversimplifying and idealizing interview situations founded on the assumptions that interview partners are moral truth tellers and always fully competent (Alvesson, 2000). Addressing these pitfalls of interview-based research is important to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings in this research. To mitigate the issues of oversimplifications and idealization of interview situations, this research uses probing questions during the interview to encourage interview participants to think critically and provide deeper and more comprehensive responses (Flick, 2018). Finally, following literature suggestions, this study applies robust data collection and analysis techniques, which are described in the following sections (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **3.1 Sample strategy and procedure**

Considering the goal of this study, the sample consisted of experts with a solid knowledge and exhaustive experience in AI technology and strategic marketing. Since this research aimed to obtain the most comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives and insights related to the effects of AI in marketing, the sample strategy of this research is

multifaceted by including AI experts, marketing professionals, AI educators and AI policy makers (see Appendix for further details on interviewees). Interviewing AI experts provides valuable knowledge about technical capabilities and limitations of AI technologies, as well as their potential applications in marketing. Marketing experts may offer insights into the practical implications of AI adoption in the industry, such as changing job roles, required skills and new strategies. AI educators contribute to the unique perspective on the knowledge and training required for marketing professionals to effectively utilize AI, while AI policy makers provide understanding of the regulatory environment and ethical considerations surrounding the implementation of AI in marketing activities.

To select participants, this research considered several individual criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of the insights gathered: domain expertise, professional experience, organizational roles, educational background, geographical location, and publications, and thought leadership (Bogner et al., 2009). Domain expertise considers the fact that interview experts should have substantial knowledge and experience in either marketing or AI, preferably in the intersection of both fields. The expertise came from academic research or professional experience. Interview participants have practical experience in implementing AI or working with AI in marketing or teaching about AI in marketing academically, ranging from 5-33 years as experts in this field. Interviewees roles included AI engineers, AI educators, AI policy makers, data scientist, marketing managers, and marketing strategists. This sample strategy also aimed to select participants with diverse organizational roles to provide a more holistic view of AI within the marketing landscape. However, it mostly focuses on C-level executives to capture the perspectives of decision-makers and strategists. Regarding the educational background, participants were selected from a wide range of fields to offer diverse viewpoints of the subject, such as computer science, data science, marketing, or business administration. The sample also included participants from different geographies to provide insights into regional variations in AI adoption and cultural differences in marketing activities. Finally, experts that have published books, articles or research papers related to AI in marketing or are recognized as thought leaders in their respective domain, were specifically targeted for this research study, as they can provide authoritative perspectives on the researched topic.

To assemble a fitting and diverse sampling of participants, this research employed a combination of strategic search approaches including leveraging own professional networks, utilizing LinkedIn connections, tapping into university affiliations, and adopting snowball sampling methods. Utilizing professional and LinkedIn connections enabled this research to take advantage of a well-curated network of professionals who have relevant expertise for this

interview study. This approach allowed for a narrowly targeted selection of interviewees which were chosen based on their backgrounds and knowledge of the subject at matter. Hence, this method ensured a high-quality and insightful pool of participants. Further, university affiliations were also a powerful resource used for this study and offered access to faculty members and researchers who possess extensive knowledge in AI, marketing, and the intersection of both fields. Interviewing research individuals enabled this research to tap into the knowledge at the forefront of the latest developments in the industry and assisted in providing cutting-edge insights. Finally, instrumentalizing snowball sampling served as a complementary method to further extend the range of experts with diverse perspectives on the effect of AI in marketing. Here, initial interviewees suggested other potential participants for further interviews and thus fostered the discovery of previously unknown experts.

Although the number of interviewees is limited given time and resource constraints, common themes have been identified which were repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. This evidence points to theoretical saturation of at least some relevant categories.

The sample of this research consisted of 16 experts from various professional and educational backgrounds as well as geographical locations. The domain expertise includes technology, marketing, policy, and education and the interviewees hold professional positions such as AI engineers, CEOs of digital marketing firms, marketing directors, data scientists, AI educators, AI policy makers and university professors. The length of their professional experience spans from 5 to 33 years and the interviewees were based in countries like Germany, Switzerland, Portugal, the Netherlands, and the UK. Additional and detailed information about the sample of this research can be found in the appendix.

### **3.2 Data collection**

In this study, the interviews were conducted in person whenever possible. Where face-to-face interviews are seen as the traditional form of generating data in qualitative studies, meeting participants in person can be unfeasible at times, for example in situations when the interview partners are geographically dispersed. Then, video conferencing is seen as the most cost effective and convenient alternative (Gray et al., 2020). Hence, some interviews were conducted through online conferencing by utilizing the application of Zoom. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed using the Presada – Transcript software. The interviews lasted between 30 – 45 minutes.

This study was based on semi-structured interviews as a way to provide a high level of flexibility and adaptability throughout the interview process. Accordingly, the interview

protocol covered five main topics, each considering various aspects of AI's impact on strategic marketing and the evolution of the job role of strategic marketers.

The interview protocol was structured as follows:

- Introduction: Participants were asked about their experience in the field of marketing and AI.
- AI in Marketing: Participants were questioned if they use AI in their current job and to provide examples of how specifically they use AI. They were also asked about the ways they think AI affects the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities currently, as well as to describe any successful and unsuccessful examples of AI implementation in marketing they have observed. Accordingly, they were asked to describe the factors that made that implementation successful or unsuccessful.
- Leading the transition to AI: Participants were asked to imagine a future job description for a strategic marketer and to consider any new skills needed to work with AI or even new job positions. They were further asked to discuss any challenges or barriers they have noticed in developing these new skills in employees.
- Outlook: Participants were questioned for their experience on what steps organizations or regulators can take to ensure that the impact of AI on jobs is positive and what they consider ethical problems with AI implementation.
- Closing: Participants were given the opportunity to add any other related thoughts about AI and its impact on marketing.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

Data collected through semi-structured interviews is commonly analyzed through content analysis as an analytic strategy usually with the aim to stay close to the data (Neergaard et al., 2009). For this study, the eminent systematic analysis approach developed by Gioia et al. (2013) was utilized as the method of analysis. It is highly suitable for analyzing data derived through inductive research since it directly approaches the general critique of a lack of “qualitative rigor” in inductive research and provides a clear and comprehensive conceptual structure for a thematic analysis of qualitative research data (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 2). This method is rooted in grounded theory and aims to derive higher-order concepts and themes from raw data through iterative coding where researchers move between the raw data and emerging concepts to refine their understanding of new insights. This approach assists in ensuring that the analysis remains based on the collected data and increases the likelihood of discovering meaning patterns and relationships (Gioia et al., 2013). The thematic data analysis according to

Gioia and colleagues (2013) involves several key stages in the analysis process. The initial stage of the Gioia method consists of open coding where the data is broken down into smaller units based on their content. Based on this, first-order concepts are derived directly from the participants' wording. This step is crucial in staying close to the data and ensuring that the thematic analysis is grounded on the participants' views. The second step of the Gioia method involves axial coding, in which the relationship between the first-order concepts is grouped into broader themes (Gioia et al., 2013). The resulting second-order themes represent the researcher's interpretation of the data and are formulated in a more abstract way than the first-order codes. The process of axial coding allows to reveal patterns and connections in the data and assists in developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Gioia et al., 2013). The final stage of the Gioia method consists of selective coding where the researcher synthesizes the second-order theme into aggregated dimensions. Accordingly, the aggregated dimensions illustrate the high-level concepts of the data and form the basis for developing a theoretical model from the collected data which contributes to the theory in the researched area (Gioia et al., 2013).

#### **4. RESULTS**

Considering all 16 interviews, the thematic analysis shows several key insights and themes emerging from the collected data (Table 1). Accordingly, the first-order categories were selected based on the most striking findings and their relevance to the research question: current AI implementation within companies, experiences of strategic marketers working with AI, factors enabling or challenging AI implementation, the impact of AI on the evolution of the job role of a strategic marketer, the crucial skills required in an AI-driven context, the challenges, or barriers in developing AI capabilities in employees and responsible AI deployment. These dimensions showcase and structure the diverse aspects and considerations when discussing the role of AI in the marketing area and its future implications.

**Table 1: Thematic analysis of the interviews based on Gioia et al., 2013**

<b>First-Order Concepts</b> <b>- Direct Quotations -</b>	<b>Second-Order Themes</b>	<b>Aggregate Dimensions</b>
"It's very exciting but very early days" (IF)	Early stage of AI capabilities in Strategic Marketing	1. Marketers acknowledge AI's current limitations, embrace its potential, and adapt to its rapidly evolving role in strategic marketing
"AI in marketing is still relatively new" (NN)		
"It's very limited at the moment" (AA)		
"It's definitely still in the early phases" (MP)		
"Know how to interact with these systems to get the best output possible will also be very critical, because there is somehow this idea that, okay, nowadays I have GPT or I have mid-journey, so everyone can get output in the same way. That is not correct." (MN)	Understanding the limitations of AI in Marketing	
"It's important to have a clear understanding of what the AI system can and cannot do." (AK)		
"It's not going to drive strategy. And because of all the flaws that I mentioned earlier, of which I think the fact that it's not plugged into current events and the existing market activity really prevents it from being an effective strategic marketing tool." (AK)		
"Marketing is such a pulse on society." (FM) [AI models are not connected to current events.]		
"Be adaptable, be flexible. You are doing your main tasks related with your work in a particular process. You have to change it maybe in six months or one year." (MN)	Potential of AI to explore in the future	
"You know, I think within a year, it's going to start to change where these large language models will start to get plugged into current events in a big way. And they're going to start to develop in more vertical implementation. So, you're going to have marketing focused large language models that understand the field of marketing exceptionally well. " (AK)		

"I think the future of AI in marketing is more about creating an experience for the user that is highly personalized and highly responsive." (AK)		
"There's so much noise and chaos right now, and things are changing so fast." (KM)	Rapid evolution and uncertainty in AI's role in Marketing	
"The moments, they are more complex than ever. We don't know what will be the state-of-the-art of artificial intelligence in the next six months." (MN)		
"It's getting better and better on a daily basis. It's not even on a monthly basis or a yearly basis. It's like every day you open Twitter, and you see something new about AI that you like the week before you didn't think it would be possible." (PM)		
"I think people need to catch up on this... On what's happening as fast as possible or... I mean, they're going to be left behind. I think things are evolving too fast to sleep on it." (PM)		
"AI can really optimize the marketing process and save a lot of money and time." (FM)	Benefits of AI usage in Marketing on efficiency	2. AI' has a dual impact on Marketing: Streamlining operations and inspiring creativity
"AI helps with customer segmentation, allowing targeted campaigns." (AA)		
"AI will reduce the operational heavy lifting work in strategic marketing." (AA)		
"AI is seen as a way to improve marketing campaigns and customer experiences." (FM)		
"With AI tools, like natural language processing, we are now able to analyze large amounts of text data and derive insights that were previously not possible." (FM)	Benefits of AI usage in Marketing on effectiveness	
"The greatest benefit from AI comes from tactical things in marketing, like content writing." (AK)		
"If you have a good CMO or a marketing director, certainly they'll be using ChatGPT a couple of times a day to help them brainstorm on things and to give them some ideas." (AK)		
"There's an emphasis on creativity and data-driven decision making" (AA)	Enhanced creativity and strategic thinking through AI Support	
"AI can help marketers focus on more creative work and higher-level thinking."(AA)		
"I think that AI will enable us to be more creative and will enable us to have more freedom." (RS)		
"Too hard for AI: creativity, curation, critical thinking." (IF)		

"Leadership skills, overview of management is crucial, if you do only routine you will lose." (PC)	Maintaining human distinctiveness in Marketing strategies	3. AI supports as an aid, not a replacement: The imperative of human element in Strategic Marketing
"You do not need further education to work with AI, but decision-making skills are crucial." (PC)		
"You need to understand the business context" (RS)		
"AI will destroy most of the hierarchies, at the top will be people who are capable to decide." (PC)		
"Human needs to be the one deciding." (PC)		
"Suddenly you might have a strategic marketing engine where mostly what the human has to do is give it a budget and control for elements of taste." (AK)		
"Marketing should not lose its emotional aspect in the age of AI." (FM)		
"It's the human touch that will still be in demand." (RS)		
"A strategic marketer is also a leader of people. And a strategic marketer can write 20-billion points, you should do this, this, this. Okay, but then there's people and there's the aspects of the human mentality engaging with your product." (PJ)		
"Marketing is about emotions, marketing is about relationships between people and brands." (FM)		
"Marketing is a very emotional thing. It's not something that you can really automate 100%." (FM)		
"I think what's going to be important is for humans to provide their taste, like their taste for style, taste for like approach, because there's just a lot of stylistic things that become important. The aspect of taste is still very human and hard for AI to develop." (AK)		
"AI will change how we think about marketing, but marketing will always be about people." (RS)		
"In the future, we will pay for the human interaction... you will eventually even pay a premium to have the human contact." (PM)		
"A lot of things get lost because people want to do it quicker, faster, cheaper. And they forget about this human touch that really makes a difference and makes it matter." (FM)		
"Humans will focus on tasks requiring creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking, while AI will take over more repetitive and data-driven tasks." (JK)		

"I think AI is not something that will replace us, but rather it will support us." (JN)	AI and human efforts complement and don't replace each other	
"I hope that education will bring us more and more to the position that technology will be seen as supportive, but not as a replacement for people." (FM)		
"So, I think thinking of AI in your organization as a team member for certain things is much more effective than seeing it more like a technology slant." (AK)		
"In marketing, AI will be supportive, not replacing people." (FM)		
"AI can help generate creative ideas, but humans provide the final touch." (AA)		
"To be on the right side is to stay up to date with what is happening. And the ones that will be able to combine the exclusive characteristics that we have as humans, such as creativity, brainstorming, all these kinds of things, be able to come up with new ideas and new ways that look at the challenge and combine that with AI will be clear the [winning] ones." (MN)		
"Some jobs might be replaced, but new opportunities will arise." (AA)	Transitioning to new roles and job opportunities created by AI	4. Adapting to AI-driven changes: Evolving skillsets and new opportunities in marketing
"New jobs and opportunities are created with AI, and everyone who wants to participate is welcome on this journey." (JN)		
"AI will create new jobs, but we need to be prepared for the changes." (IF)		
"There is a fear of job loss because of AI, but I think it's more about the transformation." (JN)		
"Every single job description will need to incorporate AI as a tool, as a requisite." (RS)	Evolving Skillsets and Organizational Structures in Marketing	
"The skillset for a marketer is changing" (AA)		
"Marketers need to understand how to leverage their data with AI algorithms." (AA)		
"I think there are opportunities for marketers to use machine learning even if they don't fully understand it." (KM)		
"Good understanding of the task you try to solve, the right skills and data." (AB)		
„The biggest challenge is change management and ensuring employees are willing to use AI." (MN)	Top-Down communication from	5. Overcoming challenges in AI
„Alignment from board to single employee is key. “ (NN)		

"It's important to communicate with the employees about the AI implementation and reassure them." (JN)	upper management for AI implementation	complementation: Transparent communication and addressing technological constraints	
"Communication from upper management is key to help employees understand the necessity of AI adoption." (PJ)			
"Because I know there's a lot of hostility towards AI too." (PM)			
„Transparency about possible job scope change is vital.“ (NN)			
"The issue lies in both the quality of data and the knowledge of people to analyze and process it." (AA)	Technological challenges of AI		
“Good data quality, if it is not saved properly, then even the best technology cannot work.” (FM)			
"The main challenge is the knowledge gap" (AB)	Addressing the AI knowledge gap through education	6. Urgency of implementing AI-focused education and training for effective AI integration and for overcoming the AI knowledge gap	
“It's about upskilling and training” (PJ)			
"The school curricula needs to incorporate AI and computer science education from a young age." (JN)			
"I think that like tech skills, computer skills, data skills, data literacy should absolutely be taught in schools." (KM)			
"I think data literacy has to be taught as soon as possible." (PJ)			
"Data literacy needs to be part of the curriculum." (IF)			
“There is a need to reskill and upskill marketers to work alongside AI.“ (AA)			
"I think education is essential to have a fast and healthy adoption of AI." (PM)			
"The current speed of AI development may outpace the changes in the educational system." (JN)			
"What's interesting is like the best way to get a good answer from a large language model like ChatGPT is to treat it like a person." (AK)			Effective collaboration through basic understanding of AI systems
"I think that if strategic marketers could have a basic understanding of what machine learning is, then they could collaborate more effectively with the data science team." (KM)			
"Need a good understanding of the model, but basic knowledge is enough." (AB)			
“When we talk about data, we get some ethical considerations around data privacy and bias.” (NN)			

<p>"I think ethical concerns are also difficult because if something goes wrong, people like to have somebody to blame." (PJ)</p>	<p>Ensuring data privacy and addressing bias in AI solutions</p>	<p>7. Tackling ethical concerns, and regulatory challenges</p>
<p>"Regulations will always be too late, no consensus, innovation stakeholders do not like it, fine balance." (IF)</p>	<p>Balancing innovation and regulation to safeguard stakeholder interests</p>	<p>in AI deployment</p>
<p>"But it's always a balance, right? Like you want to have innovation, you want to have progress, you want to have economic growth, but at the same time, you want to protect your citizen, you want to protect the workforce, you want to protect the environment. And it's really a question of how you strike that balance." (JK)</p>		

#### **4.1 Marketers acknowledge AI's current limitations, embrace its potential, and adapt to its rapidly evolving role in strategic marketing**

The current status of AI in strategic marketing reflects a rapidly evolving landscape marked by both excitement but also recognition of current limitations. Despite the potential of AI, marketers acknowledge that its capabilities in strategic marketing are still developing. AI's current utility lies predominantly in tactical areas of marketing such as content creation, customer segmentation, and targeted campaign design. For instance, AI tools, including NLP, facilitate the analysis of vast amounts of text data, yielding previously inaccessible insights. Yet, the technology remains in its nascent stages, with its full potential yet to be realized.

A critical part of harnessing AI's capabilities lies in recognizing and navigating its limitations. According to AK, "it's important to have a clear understanding of what the AI system can and cannot do.". Despite the proliferation of AI tools like ChatGPT and Mid-journey, not every user will derive the same output or benefits. Understanding how to interact with these systems to optimize their output is a key skill that marketers need to develop. There is a necessity for adaptability and flexibility, as the tools and processes that are relevant today may need to be revised or replaced in the short term.

According to FM, at the heart of marketing lies its role as a societal pulse, which underscores its importance in understanding and reacting to societal trends, consumer behaviors and cultural changes, a characteristic that AI has yet to fully emulate. While AI can enhance personalization and responsiveness in user experiences, its current lack of connection to current events and ongoing market activity limits its strategic effectiveness. It is important to note that AI does not drive strategy, and its limitations, such as the absence of real-time contextual awareness, undermine its efficacy as a strategic marketing tool.

However, the future of AI in marketing is expected to see significant advancements. Within a year, large language models (LLM) are predicted to start integrating current events, leading to more vertical implementations. This will see the emergence of marketing focused LLMs with a deep understanding of the field. However, the promise of these advancements is tempered by the caution that AI's ability to drive strategy is still a distant goal, primarily due to its aforementioned limitations. The future of AI in marketing, therefore, lies in a complex interplay of potential, limitations, and the need for marketers to continually adapt to and navigate this evolving landscape.

#### **4.2 AI's dual impact on marketing: Streamlining operations and inspiring creativity**

The second category of findings reflects how AI is reshaping the marketing field by serving a dual function. On the one hand, AI is optimizing marketing processes by automating

tasks, saving significant amounts of time and money, and reducing operational burdens. This efficiency enables marketers to direct more resources toward strategic initiatives.

On the other hand, AI is indirectly fostering creativity and strategic thinking. According to AA, "AI can help marketers focus on more creative work and higher-level thinking.". This dynamic is transforming marketing campaigns and customer experiences, with AI serving as both a facilitator and an enabler of innovative marketing approaches. This shift in focus is not just about the tasks performed but also about the quality of strategic thinking that can be achieved when freed from routine operational tasks. Thus, AI's impact is not limited to operational efficiency but extends to enhancing the creative and strategic aspects of marketing. The belief that AI will enable greater creativity and freedom within marketing roles underscores a future vision of marketing that is both data-driven and creatively inspired.

In conclusion, according to most interviewees, leveraging AI has the potential to redefine the role of the marketer, shifting the emphasis from operational tasks to a more strategic and creative role, which can ultimately lead to improved marketing campaigns and customer experiences.

#### **4.3 AI as a support, not a replacement: The necessity of human element in strategic marketing**

The next finding of this study suggests the continued essential role of human skills in marketing despite the increasing adoption of AI. Especially skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and emotional understanding prove to be critical for strategic marketers. While AI can perform routine tasks and data analysis more efficiently and effectively, it cannot replace the uniquely human ability to understand and connect with customers on an emotional level, a crucial aspect of strategic marketing. Marketing is fundamentally about relationships between people and brands, about emotions, and these aspects are still very human and challenging for AI to emulate. Moreover, leadership skills and business context understanding remain central, as humans need to guide AI's application and interpret its output within the broader business framework. According to IF, the curation of AI models output will remain a critical aspect of strategic marketer's job activities. This highlights the complementary nature of AI and human efforts in marketing, with AI seen as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for human marketers and that AI will not replace jobs but will instead transform them. This is echoed by the consensus among interviewed marketing professionals, where AK mentions that marketers are "going to be providing their taste, like their taste for style or taste for [marketing] approach, because there are just a lot of stylistic things that become important". This finding showcases that marketing strategies developed fully by AI are not considered sufficient at this moment but

that human marketers are the ones that make marketing strategies touching and hence appealing to customers. Also, FM mentions that “marketing is one of the very few areas where AI actually is rather supportive than replacing it.” The future of marketing, therefore, is not about choosing between humans and AI but about integrating them in a way that leverages the strengths of both. Interviewees seem to agree that marketers who can combine their distinct human skills with AI's capabilities will be the ones to succeed in this evolving landscape. Furthermore, the importance of human touch suggests that there may even be a premium on human interaction in the future, underlining the enduring value of human elements in marketing according to the interviewee JK who states that “interaction with humans comes at a premium”.

The future of marketing may see a strategic marketing engine powered by AI, where the primary human input is budgeting and controlling elements of taste. However, marketing leaders emphasize that humans need to be the ones deciding.

To conclude, while AI will change how we think about marketing, the essence of marketing will always be about people. The predominant strategy will be the ability to combine the exclusive characteristics of humans, such as creativity and brainstorming, with AI, considering it as a supportive team member.

#### **4.4 Adapting to AI-driven changes: Evolving skillsets and new opportunities in marketing**

This finding highlights the transformative impact of AI on the marketing landscape, leading to new job opportunities and the need for marketers to adapt their skillsets. While there may be concerns about job losses due to AI, the focus should be on the transformation and evolution of roles within the marketing field. AI integration will require marketers to develop new competencies, such as leveraging data and understanding AI algorithms, (AA) to remain relevant in the industry. Marketers are expected to grasp the potential of AI, even if they don't fully understand the entire technical aspects. According to KM, " there are opportunities for marketers to use machine learning even if they don't fully understand it." Hence, the key is to have a clear understanding of the task at hand and the appropriate skills and data to solve it using AI tools.

Further, especially communication skills will be getting even more important for marketers with the evolution of AI capabilities in the future where AK states that “those who can communicate effectively and clearly will be very powerful”. This finding is also supported by IF who mentions that she sees the future of marketer jobs evolving to “AI whisperers”, where marketing professionals who are able to communicate with AI effectively will be the ones winning.

To conclude, the appearance of AI in marketing is seen as a journey, and everyone willing to participate and adapt is welcome (IF). However, it is emphasized that preparedness for change is crucial. New jobs and opportunities powered by AI can only be fully realized if marketers are prepared to evolve their skills and adapt to new organizational structures. According to AK, “strategic thinkers, conceptual thinkers, and good communicators are the future of strong marketing roles.”

#### **4.5 Overcoming challenges in AI implementation: Transparent communication and addressing technological constraints**

The implementation of AI in strategic marketing comes with its own set of challenges with the most significant ones being change management and technological constraints.

On the one hand, change management is critical in ensuring employees' willingness to use AI. According to PJ, "communication from upper management is key to help employees understand the necessity of AI adoption.". Thus, it requires a strong commitment from management, emphasizing clear top-down communication to foster alignment between board members and individual employees. This transparency in communication is crucial in managing changes within the organization, especially in addressing potential concerns about job scope changes, perceived threats of AI, or even existing hostility towards the technology.

On the other hand, there are technological challenges to tackle. The successful deployment of AI relies heavily on the quality of data where even the most sophisticated technology may fail without clean and well-structured data.

Overall, the willingness of employees to use AI, guided by the reassurance and clear communication from management, along with addressing technological constraints, are decisive in navigating the transition towards AI-enabled marketing strategies.

#### **4.6 Urgency of implementing AI-focused education and training for effective AI integration and for overcoming the AI knowledge gap**

This finding illustrates the critical role of education and training in driving the successful integration of AI in strategic marketing. This includes fostering a basic understanding of AI systems, which promotes effective collaboration with data science teams and optimized utilization of AI resources. This doesn't require in-depth technical knowledge, instead, a good understanding of the model and its capabilities is enough. Nevertheless, JN mentions that "the school curricula needs to incorporate AI and computer science education from a young age."

Furthermore, the adoption of AI literacy and computer science into school curricula from an early age is advocated to prepare future generations for a rapidly digitizing world.

However, there are concerns that the current speed of AI development may outpace changes in the educational system, leading to a persistent knowledge gap. This makes the need for reskilling and upskilling even more urgent.

This comprehensive multi-level approach to education and training is seen as a key strategy in overcoming knowledge gaps and resistance and ensuring a healthy and efficient adoption of AI in marketing.

To summarize, according to FM and all other interviewees, the way to mitigate the AI knowledge gap is “Education. Education. Education.”.

#### **4.7 Tackling ethical concerns and regulatory challenges in AI deployment**

The final finding of this study underscores the complexity of ethical and regulatory issues surrounding the use of AI in strategic marketing. Concerns about data privacy and bias are highlighted, with a call for attention to these factors when implementing AI solutions. The use of large datasets in AI solutions demand rigid data privacy measures to protect individual information. Simultaneously, bias in data or algorithms can lead to skewed results, raising ethical dilemmas. The issue of accountability also presents a complex challenge. As one expert noted, when things go wrong, people like to have someone to blame. This becomes problematic with AI systems, where responsibility for errors or biases can be hard to pinpoint.

The issue of regulation in AI deployment is a delicate balancing act. On one hand, innovation and economic growth are looked after, and regulations are often perceived as barriers by stakeholders. PJ mentions that according to his experience he believes that “the impact of technology is always positive”. But on the other hand, regulations are vital for protecting citizens, the workforce, and the environment (IF). It is important to note that the challenge there is in ensuring that regulations are not too late and do not repress innovation, while at the same time are protecting stakeholder interests (PJ).

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Theoretical and managerial contributions**

Comparison between the existing literature review and this study highlights both confirmations of previous research as well as new perspective by bringing light to the question of how the job role of strategic marketers is changing and how the current practical environment adjusts to the changing landscape of marketing. In the following, this study reveals three main theoretical and managerial contributions to the current body of literature.

The first contribution suggests a framework which showcases the potential of marketing activities being impacted by AI implementation. This contribution is underpinned by findings 1-3 of this thesis. The first finding of this study resonates with the literature's affirmations that AI is playing a transformative role in customer-related and strategic marketing (Kumar et al., 2020). However, an important new insight is the recognition of AI's limitations in strategic marketing roles, such as lack of real-time contextual awareness, which is a crucial aspect for any marketer to understand market dynamics and trends. This highlights the need for human involvement and decision-making in strategic marketing, a contribution that has significant implications for business management. The second finding, which presents the dual role of AI in marketing operations and creativity, mirrors the literature's emphasis on AI's capacity to automate tasks and foster creativity (Mesquita et al., 2019). Still, the novel insight where AI indirectly promotes creativity and strategic thinking by freeing up marketers from routine tasks provides a more nuanced understanding of how AI can enhance the creative and strategic aspects of marketing. This indicates that business leaders should invest in AI not just to increase operational efficiency but also to foster a more innovative and strategic marketing approach. Further, the third finding of this study, which shows that AI should be seen as support and not a replacement of strategic marketers supports the literature's argument of the continued importance of human skills in marketing (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018). However, it also provides a richer picture of the complementary relationship between AI and human marketers, emphasizing the necessity of human qualities like creativity and emotional understanding. This finding is critical for management, indicating that successful AI integration requires a balanced approach that combines AI's capabilities with the unique skills of human marketers.

**Figure 1: Framework for Implementation of AI Capabilities in Strategic Marketing**

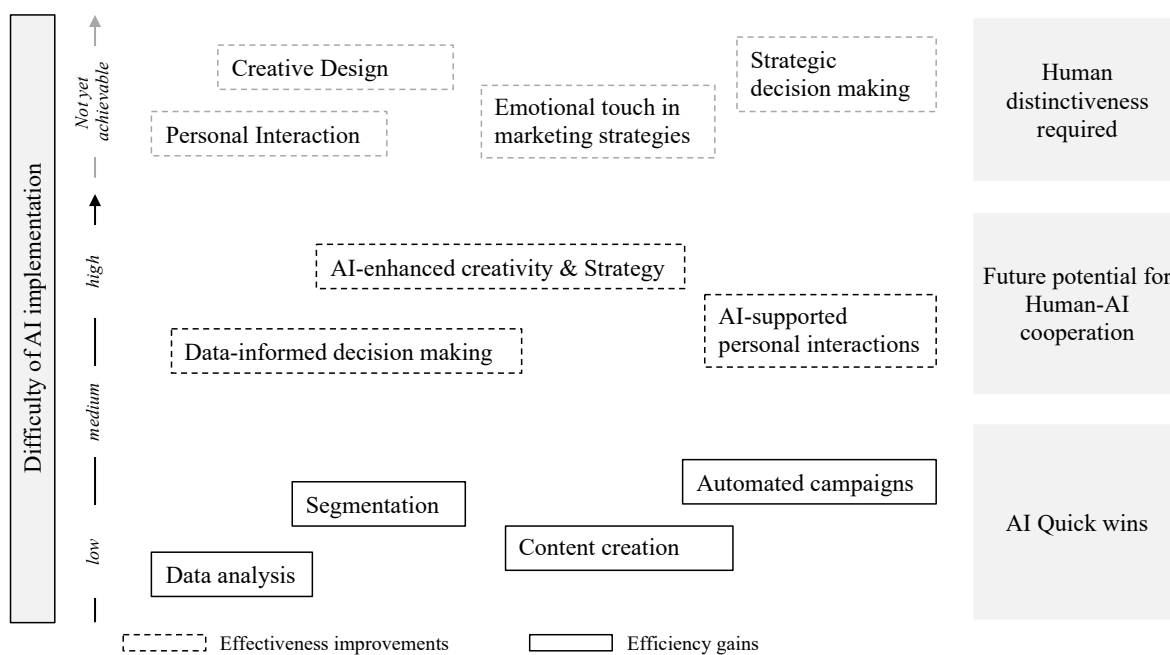


Figure 1 offers a conceptual framework which represents the integration of AI capabilities in various marketing activities and identifies areas of interaction between AI and humans in the marketing field. It builds upon the theoretical contributions of marketing and AI literature and offers several noteworthy contributions to academic dialogue. The framework shows how AI can enhance efficiency in four key marketing activities relatively easily: Data analysis, segmentation, content creation and automated campaigns, so-called “AI Quick wins”. The framework further shows the future potential for Human-AI cooperation in the following use-cases to primarily improve their effectiveness: Data-informed decision making, AI-enhanced creativity and strategy as well as AI-supported personal interactions. The framework emphasizes the balance between AI and human roles in these activities, highlighting areas of synergy where the combined capabilities result in superior marketing outcomes. It is also a pivotal tool for businesses looking to leverage AI for optimal marketing effectiveness and efficiency. The figure further identifies areas in which human expertise and uniqueness remain irreplaceable for now, such as creative design, personal interactions, the emotional touch in marketing strategies and finally strategic decision making. These areas require a strong human touch and reinforce the human expertise in an increasingly AI-driven landscape. In order to not lose sight of these vital marketing activities due to technological advancements, the framework suggests a focus on the synergistic collaboration between humans and AI for optimal marketing outcomes.

The second theoretical and managerial contribution of this study highlights the need for marketers to develop a new skill set and the urge for an adapting educational curriculum. This contribution aligns with the fourth and sixth finding of this study. The fourth finding of this research highlights the evolving skillsets and the according new opportunities in marketing due to AI implementation. This finding echoes the literature's perspective on the transformation of marketing roles due to AI (Davenport et al., 2020). Still, it goes further by highlighting the need for marketers to develop new competencies to remain relevant in the industry. Especially important is the ability to communicate effectively with various stakeholders and cross-functional teams, as well as improving the understanding of AI algorithms to leverage the full potential of AI tools for strategic marketing. For business management, this finding underlines the importance of fostering continuous learning and adaptability in their marketing teams. Following, the study's sixth finding emphasizes the urgent need for AI-centric education and training to bridge the knowledge gap, which aligns with the literature on the subject. Davenport et al., (2020) underscore the need for continuous learning and development of necessary skill sets in response to AI's impact. The demand for technological, social, emotional, and creative skills is rising (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019), a trend that reflects in this finding. This study reveals the necessity for understanding of AI systems, but a novel finding is that basic understanding of AI systems should be sufficient for marketers to be able to work effectively with AI. Literature further emphasizes the importance of collaboration between stakeholders, government, and educators in reshaping educational programs (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018). However, findings from this research underline a unique aspect - the potential lag between the pace of AI development and changes in the educational system, which shows a fresh perspective and is not widely discussed in the existing literature. From a managerial perspective, these findings reinforce the importance of investing in AI education and training for their marketing teams, not only to leverage AI's capabilities effectively but also to remain competitive in the evolving market landscape.

Finally, the third contribution of this study includes challenges surrounding AI usage in corporations, acknowledging AI implementation challenges as well as regulation and ethical challenges. This contribution is backed by the fifth and seventh findings of this research. The fifth finding of this study tackles the question on how to overcome challenges in AI implementation. The challenges of AI implementation are well-documented in the literature (Bughin, Brussels, Hazan, et al., 2018). However, this study expands upon these challenges, emphasizing the importance of transparent communication in change management and the need

to confront technological constraints, including data quality. All of these practical insights are invaluable for business leaders who are planning to integrate AI into their marketing strategies. To conclude, the seventh finding of this qualitative study deals with ethical and regulatory complexities in the application of AI in strategic marketing, a theme resonating with the literature. Existing sources discuss the dual-edge nature of AI, where it offers significant benefits but also introduces ethical dilemmas (Ameen et al., 2022). Findings of this study further delve into the difficulty of these dilemmas, particularly focusing on data privacy, bias, and the accountability issue, areas that are not deeply explored in the literature yet. From a regulatory standpoint, findings of this study echo the sentiments of Weingarten et al., (2020) who discuss the need for appropriate regulations to guide AI's application. However, this study uniquely highlights the delicate balancing act involved in formulating regulations that foster innovation while safeguarding stakeholder interests, a perspective not commonly discussed in the literature. These findings are crucial for managers who are implementing or planning to implement AI in their marketing strategies. They need to be aware of these ethical and regulatory challenges to ensure that their strategies not only align with ethical guidelines but are also adaptable to possible future regulations.

## **5.2 Limitations and further research**

This study offers novel and valuable insights into the role of AI in strategic marketing, nevertheless it is crucial to recognize limitations and showcase areas for future research. First, this study focused primarily on the perspectives of marketing professionals and AI experts. While this approach provided a wealth of insights into the current state of AI integration in strategic marketing and future trends, it may not fully capture other stakeholders' viewpoints, such as customers or technology developers. Future research could benefit from examining these different perspectives to provide a more comprehensive picture of AI's role in strategic marketing.

Further, the nature of this study is purposefully qualitative thus relies on interviews and textual analysis of the collected data. Where this approach allows for deep and flexible exploration of the topic under investigation, it could be helpful to complement this study with quantitative research to verify and generalize findings in a more comprehensive way. For that, surveys or experiments which quantify the impacts of AI on strategic marketing could be instrumentalized.

Additionally, the topic of this study is very nascent, and the rapid pace of AI development means that the landscape continues to evolve. The findings in this study can only provide a snapshot of the current state of events and advancements, and the fast improvements

in AI technology could indicate that these findings may become less relevant over time. Therefore, continued research is required to keep up with these developments and to further understand the impacts of AI on strategic marketing.

Further, this study mentions the ethical and regulatory aspect of AI in strategic marketing. However, these complex topics could be explored in greater detail. For example, future research could develop ethical guidelines for AI use in marketing or investigate different regulatory frameworks across different countries. These findings could assist marketers or management in understanding the regulatory landscape when implementing AI strategies.

Similarly, the study's findings point to the need for continuous education and training in AI for marketers. Therefore, future research could investigate effective methods for such education and training, including exploring the potential of online learning platforms and AI-focused certifications.

Finally, as the study identifies a potential discrepancy between the speed of AI development and changes in the educational system, future research could explore how educational systems worldwide are adapting to this challenge and suggest strategies to bridge this gap effectively.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The message of this thesis is simple yet powerful: AI is transforming strategic marketing, but the human element remains irreplaceable. The research suggests that successful AI integration in strategic marketing requires a balanced approach that combines AI's capabilities with the unique skills of human marketers, continuous learning and adaptability, transparent communication, addressing technological constraints, focused education and training, and a strong commitment to ethical practices.

The study offers significant contributions to theory and practice. For theory, the findings provide a more nuanced view on effectiveness and efficiency of AI capabilities in strategic marketing. For practitioners, the findings underline the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach to AI integration in marketing. Business leaders need to understand and navigate AI's limitations and potentials, foster a conducive environment for continuous learning and adaptability, communicate effectively during AI implementation, ensure quality of data, invest in AI-focused education and training, and give due consideration to ethical practices when deploying AI. For managers, this means leveraging AI's potential by instrumentalizing its power for efficiency and creativity, while acknowledging its current limitations.

AI should be viewed as a powerful assistant, not a replacement, working together with human creativity and emotional understanding. Adapting to this new landscape also involves evolving skillsets. Managers should foster an environment of continuous learning and AI literacy, preparing their teams for the AI-driven future. Yet, next to this transformation, ethical and regulatory considerations remain predominant. Balancing innovation with privacy, bias, and regulatory concerns is a delicate but necessary issue to deal with.

In a nutshell, the future of strategic marketing lies in the harmonious integration of AI and human skills, the continuous evolution of skillsets, and a mindful approach to ethics and regulations. The journey is ongoing, but those ready to adapt and evolve will undoubtedly thrive.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix 1: Interview participants

Interview Participants					
#	Identification	Position	Domain expertise	Tenure in years	Geographical location
1	Expert JN	Robotist, AI Engineer	Technology	7	Germany
2	Expert LK	AI Expert at OECD	Policy, Technology	11	Germany
3	Expert KM	Data Scientist in Marketing/ E-commerce	Technology	5	Switzerland
4	Expert PJ	CEO Digital Marketing Firm, WY Group	Marketing	29	Portugal
5	Expert MS	Marketing and Communication Director	Marketing	17	Portugal
6	Expert MB	AI Educator	Educator, Technology	18	Portugal
7	Expert AK	CEO of AI solution company, ssembly.ai	Technology, Marketing	22	Netherlands
8	Expert RS	Head of Marketing at AI company, Former Unilever Head of Marketing	Marketing	23	Portugal
9	Expert NN	Head of Market Intelligence, Galp	Marketing	27	Portugal
10	Expert CL	Head of Marketing Operations at AI company	Marketing	11	Switzerland

<b>11</b>	<b>Expert AA</b>	Head of Product Strategy & Design at WY Group	Marketing	13	Portugal
<b>12</b>	<b>Expert MP</b>	Co-Founder & Creative Partner	Marketing	16	Portugal
<b>13</b>	<b>Expert IF</b>	Digital, Marketing & Communication Consultant	Technology, Marketing	19	Portugal
<b>14</b>	<b>Expert AB</b>	Head of AI Engineering at AI solution	Technology	10	UK
<b>15</b>	<b>Expert FM</b>	Director at AI solution for Marketing	Technology, Marketing	6	Germany
<b>16</b>	<b>Expert PC</b>	PhD Marketing Management at CLSBE	Educator, Marketing	33	Portugal

## Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview protocol

#	Topic	Questions
1	Introduction	- What is your experience in the field of marketing and AI?
2	AI in Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you use Ai in your current job? Can you provide examples of how you use AI?</li> <li>- In what way do you think AI will affect the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities?</li> <li>- Can you describe any successful examples of AI implementation in marketing that you have observed and what made these implementations successful?</li> <li>- Do you also have an unsuccessful example of AI implementations? What have you observed and what made it unsuccessful?</li> </ul>
3	Leading the transition to AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If you would have to imagine a future job description for a marketer, are there any new skills needed specially to work with AI? Or even new job positions?</li> <li>- Have you noticed any challenges or barriers to developing these new skills in employees?</li> </ul>
4	Outlook	- In your opinion, what steps can organizations take to ensure that the impact of AI on jobs is positive?
5	Closing	- Is there anything else you would like to add about AI and its impact on marketing?