



## **The Use of Artificial Intelligence in B2B Marketing Processes**

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## Abstract

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<p>This bachelor's thesis examines the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) and business-to-business (B2B) marketing, investigating how marketers are integrating AI tools into their work and exploring the perceived impact of AI on marketing practices. The research, conducted within a single B2B marketing agency based in Finland, employed a mixed-method approach, gathering qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with four marketing professionals and in-depth surveys from five additional professionals at the agency.</p> <p>The findings reveal that while AI is primarily viewed as a supplemental tool that enhances efficiency and augments human capabilities, its role is rapidly evolving. AI currently functions as a valuable assistant, helping with tasks like data analysis and content generation, but ultimately remains under human control. Interviewees describe AI as a "sparring partner" that stimulates creativity and refines strategic thinking, suggesting AI also has the potential to refine higher-level marketing processes.</p> <p>The study identifies key themes surrounding AI adoption in B2B marketing: AI's current role as a supplemental tool rather than a replacement for human marketers, the need for marketers to adapt to the evolving capabilities of AI and develop new skills, the importance of addressing ethical considerations and ensuring responsible AI use, and the enduring value of human expertise in areas where AI falls short. The research highlights the necessity of establishing clear ethical guidelines and practices to ensure responsible AI implementation, particularly regarding data privacy and security. The research also emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and skill development for marketers to effectively leverage the evolving capabilities of AI, such as prompt engineering and critically evaluating AI-generated content.</p> <p>By comparing the findings with existing literature, this thesis bridges the gap between theoretical understandings of AI and its practical applications within the dynamic landscape of B2B marketing. The study contributes to a growing body of knowledge on AI's impact on business practices, providing valuable insights and giving practical recommendations for B2B marketers seeking to navigate the opportunities and challenges of this transformative technology.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Artificial Intelligence, B2B Marketing, Human Expertise, Digital Transformation, Innovation

# Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background and Motivation .....	1
1.2	Objectives of the Study .....	2
1.3	Significance of the Research .....	2
1.4	Structure of the Thesis.....	3
1.5	Key Words .....	3
2	Theoretical Framework.....	5
2.1	Setting the Stage for AI in B2B Marketing .....	5
2.2	Tracing the Evolution of B2B Marketing.....	6
2.3	The History of Artificial Intelligence.....	8
2.4	Theoretical Summary: The Integration of AI in B2B Marketing.....	9
3	Research Design & Implementation.....	11
3.1	Participants and Sampling .....	11
3.2	Data Collection and Management Methods.....	11
3.3	Data Analysis Methodologies.....	13
4	Findings and Insights .....	14
4.1	Participant Profile.....	14
4.2	Interpretation of Results.....	14
4.2.1	Interview .....	15
4.2.2	Survey .....	17
4.2.3	Combined Insights and Themes Identified.....	20
4.3	Bridging Theory and Practice: Comparison with Existing Literature.....	21
4.3.1	Theme 1: AI as a Supplemental Tool, Not a Replacement .....	21
4.3.2	Theme 2: The Evolving Role of AI and the Need for Adapting.....	22
4.3.3	Theme 3: Ethical Considerations and the Importance of Responsible Use .....	23
4.3.4	Theme 4: AI's Impact on Marketing Skills and the Value of Human Expertise .....	23
5	Discussion.....	25
5.1	Implications for B2B Marketing .....	25
5.2	Challenges and Opportunities of AI .....	26
5.3	Ethical Considerations .....	27
5.4	Recommendations for Practitioners.....	27
5.5	Reflection .....	28
5.5.1	Revisiting the Study Objectives.....	28
5.5.2	The Ethics and Reliability of the Research.....	29
5.5.3	Learning Reflection .....	30

6 Conclusion..... 32

Sources..... 33

Appendices ..... 35

    Appendix 1. Interview Questions..... 35

    Appendix 2. Interview Participant Information Sheet ..... 36

    Appendix 3. Interview Participant Consent Form ..... 37

    Appendix 4. Survey Questions..... 38

    Appendix 5. Survey Participant Information Sheet..... 39

# 1 Introduction

This thesis dives into the B2B (business-to-business) marketing world, and more specifically, how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used by marketers throughout their work. The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of AI's utilization and potential in the B2B marketing space, as well as to discuss how we got here, what the future might hold, and the implications that follow.

## 1.1 Background and Motivation

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has undoubtedly had a transformative impact across industries. In the words of Marc Benioff (chair, CEO and co-founder of Salesforce), "Artificial intelligence and generative AI may be the most important technology of any lifetime" (Minevich, 2024). As a result of AI's rapid development and ever-expanding reach, business processes and the way professionals approach their work have been reshaped in a way that has changed the space entirely. Because of AI, we can analyze data much more efficiently, gain insights we haven't been able to before, and automate the tracking of various metrics, among many other things. In addition to improving efficiency, AI has become, for many marketers, a sparring partner of sorts. With its constant learning and development, AI has increasingly become a tool for all manner of marketing processes.

Gen AI (generative AI) has been one of the biggest advancements we have seen emerge, and its implementation can be seen far and wide. Tools like ChatGPT, GPT-4, Claude, Copilot and others are now integral parts of many professional lives. From brainstorming article ideas to generating the full texts, these tools can open many doors. Gen-AI is constantly evolving and improving, as it continuously trains itself on more and more data. All users need to do is to input prompts, which the AI then uses to generate desired content. For marketers, this can be used to ideate articles, as aforementioned, but also to assist in copywriting and other content creation. Furthermore, gen-AI can be used to analyze/sift through data efficiently. It might also be able to pinpoint trends/patterns that a normal person cannot (McGuire, 2024).

While gen-AI has unlocked a whole new wave of potential, there are concerns that come alongside it. With AI-generated content, there is a lack of the "human" factor that, well, humans resonate with. And since marketing is, at its foundation, all about human connection, the "human" factor is incredibly important. In addition, the line is blurry when it comes to crediting work. At what point is it necessary to discuss and disclose the use of AI in one's work? Furthermore, it is important to look at data that AI has analyzed with a discerning eye, as it can make mistakes.

In addition to gen-AI, there are plenty of other use cases of AI in B2B marketing. CRM (customer relationship management) and marketing automation systems like Salesforce and HubSpot are general practice nowadays and have been since Salesforce's introduction in the 2000s. These have also developed their own gen-AI tools, allowing for concentrated operations within each platform. These platforms facilitate things such as tracking campaigns, generating and scheduling content, managing contacts, and much more (Kushner, 2024).

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

From some of the earliest ideas about intelligent machines in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Craig et al., 2024), to the widespread integration of AI we know today, there is no denying the impact it has had. With that, what can marketers do to make the most of the situation? What is the best way to navigate this space that is constantly evolving? And crucially, how can that be done in a safe and ethical way? To understand this, we need to first understand how marketers are currently utilizing AI, and what their attitudes around it are. What has AI integration been like? Are there any concerns surrounding it? This study aims to give insight into just that, as well as to allow for a better understanding of AI in general.

Through interviews with professionals working at a B2B marketing agency based in Finland, and supplemented by a survey as well as theoretical research, the goal is to not only connect the dots, but to also fill in the picture when it comes to the topic of AI use in B2B marketing processes. This study aims to identify core practices using AI in B2B marketing, what concerns exist and what improvements can be made.

## **1.3 Significance of the Research**

This study looks at the use of AI through the lens of a B2B marketing agency. While there is a lot to be gleaned from the world of marketing, there are many distinct differences between B2C (business-to-customer) and B2B settings. While AI in B2C prioritizes personalization and more immediate engagement, in B2B the focus is on longer sales cycles and building relationships (Ballantine, 2021).

In B2C marketing, we see a lot of focus on AI application in personalizing content for individual customers based on factors such as persona, behavior and purchasing history. The customer journey is typically a bit more complex with B2B cases and involves a longer sales cycle. In these cases, AI is of use in managing campaigns and analyzing data. B2B cases often also involve multiple stakeholders and decision makers, with the decision process in general being a longer one. AI in a B2B context is used for content generation & ideation, identifying leads, and targeting (Haenlein & Kaplan 2019, p. 2; Ballantine, 2021).

The significance of this research is in the qualitative research done through interviews and supplemented by a survey. By talking to professionals working in a B2B marketing agency, we can understand, through their experiences, what improvements can be made to ensure sustainable and successful utilization of AI in marketing processes.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

The groundwork for this thesis is laid out in this current introduction chapter and will be expanded upon in the literature review and theoretical framework sections (Chapter 2). These include an analysis of existing literature and a deep dive into the development of B2B marketing (Chapter 2.2) and AI (Chapter 2.3), as well as laying out the current situation (Chapter 2.4). Following this, the framework for the study and the research design & implementation will be discussed (Chapter 3). In the case of this thesis, the study is conducted through qualitative research in the form of interviews (Appendix 1), supplemented by a survey (Appendix 4) that contains a condensed version of the interview questions. The analysis and synthesization of study results (Chapter 4) are followed by a discussion (Chapter 5) regarding the implications of results (Chapter 5.1), challenges identified (Chapter 5.2), as well as ethical considerations (Chapter 5.3) and recommendations for practitioners (Chapter 5.4). Finally, there is a reflection upon the study itself (Chapter 5.5).

#### **1.5 Key Words**

The key words that describe this thesis are artificial intelligence, B2B marketing, human expertise, digital transformation, and innovation. Together, they touch on the main themes and insights brought up throughout the study and offer a full picture of what the thesis is, at its core, about.

Artificial intelligence is the central focus of the thesis, exploring its integration into various B2B marketing processes. B2B marketing is a key concept as well, since the thesis specifically examines AI's impact on B2B marketing, highlighting the unique characteristics and challenges of this field within the context of AI. The thesis traces the evolution of both AI and B2B marketing, touching on their convergence into what the current space looks like.

The thesis consistently emphasizes the enduring value of human skills and expertise in B2B marketing, even as AI becomes more sophisticated, highlighting AI's role as a supplemental tool to marketers. Human expertise remains incredibly important, as is brought up throughout the study. Creativity, emotional intelligence and relationship building remain as core competencies in B2B marketing, even with the integration of AI.

Digital transformation is a broader concept that encompasses the integration of digital technologies such as AI across all areas of business. This thesis implicitly addresses digital transformation by

examining the effect of AI on B2B marketing practices. Innovation is also a broader topic addressed throughout this study, as it discusses how AI is fostering innovation in B2B marketing and is enabling marketers to experiment with new tools and strategies.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the theoretical basis for understanding the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into business-to-business (B2B) marketing practices. It examines the foundations, history, and key trends that shape the evolving role of AI in marketing.

As mentioned, AI is constantly transforming business operations, including those within B2B marketing. AI has made many processes more efficient, including data analysis, content generation, personalized interactions, and optimized marketing strategies. This integration of AI in B2B marketing is facilitated by the increasing accessibility and affordability of AI technologies, coupled with advancements in computing power and the availability of large datasets (Deveau et al., 2023).

This chapter examines the evolution of AI in B2B marketing. It highlights critical use cases, limitations, and future trends, through an analysis of existing literature. To start, this chapter outlines the evolution of B2B marketing, moving from traditional sales approaches to the emergence of digital and data-driven strategies. This will provide an overview of B2B marketing history, highlighting key eras and shifts in focus. Then, the chapter will explore the definition and evolution of AI, tracing its roots from early conceptualizations to its current state. Building upon this historical context, the chapter will discuss the convergence of AI and B2B marketing. It will explore how AI technologies are being leveraged to enhance various aspects of B2B marketing.

### 2.1 Setting the Stage for AI in B2B Marketing

To understand AI's full potential, it is necessary to clearly define it. AI is widely defined as a system's capacity to accurately interpret external data, learn from that data, and apply that learning to achieve specific goals and tasks through adaptable adjustments. In simpler terms, AI aims to enable machines to mimic human intelligence and perform tasks that typically require human cognition (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p.1; Craig et al., 2024).

AI simulates human thought processes and learns from data. It involves creating computer systems that can perform tasks that usually require human intelligence, such as learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. In addition, AI systems often use machine learning algorithms to analyse large datasets and identify patterns, enabling them to make predictions and thus improve their performance over time. However, AI is not a single technology, instead encompassing various techniques that include machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, robotics, and computer vision. Its utilization can be seen across diverse fields, such as healthcare, business,

education, finance, law, entertainment, journalism, software development, security, and manufacturing (Craig et al., 2024).

Through increased digitization and automation of business processes, the foundation has been laid for AI's widespread adoption in the B2B marketing space. This transition is driven by the availability of large datasets and advanced computing power, allowing for the development of sophisticated AI models that mimic human cognitive abilities in identifying patterns and learning from data, with the caveat that it cannot, of course, replace human thought (Haenlein & Kaplan 2019, p. 2).

Not only is AI becoming increasingly accessible, but its implementation is also relatively inexpensive. This makes it an accessible tool for businesses of all sizes. The other side of the coin here is that because it is so accessible and thus widely implemented, AI utilization has practically become a necessity to keep up with competition. The rise of gen-AI and other toolsets has presented new opportunities for B2B marketers, enabling growth acceleration, productivity and efficiency-boosting, and streamlining processes (Deveau et al., 2023).

## **2.2 Tracing the Evolution of B2B Marketing**

Before the rise of digital marketing, B2B marketing was known as "industrial marketing" and primarily relied on sales teams. Marketing departments were rare, and sales teams used methods like cold calling, direct mail, trade shows and trade publication advertising to connect with potential customers. Building strong personal relationships with prospects was crucial to influencing their buying decisions. This emphasis on personal connection remains a fundamental principle in B2B marketing today (Ballantine, 2021).

Early forms of B2B marketing can be traced back to the 1800s, through industrial magazines. For example, John Deere's "The Furrow" taught farming techniques to farmers, and the "American Railroad Journal" was targeted at miners and manufacturers and likely also relied heavily on direct sales and relationships. In the 1850s, conventions and trade shows emerged as a significant aspect of B2B marketing at the time, providing a platform for businesses to showcase their products to other businesses and build relationships with potential clients. The Great Exhibition in England in 1851 marked a turning point. World fairs brought niche products to buyers who prioritized innovation over price. Innovations showcased at these fairs include the lightbulb, libraries, and bubble-gum (Ballantine, 2021).

The pre-digital era revolved very much around personal relationships and networking. Sales teams drove marketing efforts, relying heavily on trade catalogues to showcase products and services, sales enablement literature to aid sales teams in their efforts, targeted mail campaigns to potential customers, and in-house magazines to provide information to customers and to cultivate loyalty

and engagement. Businesses also sometimes focused on marketing to the end customer (B2B2C marketing), even if their primary target was other businesses, in order to drive demand and create buzz (Kushner, 2024). The Consumer Electronics Show (CES), launched in 1968 in Las Vegas, significantly expanded the trade show industry. Conventions and trade shows continue to be valuable platforms for B2B marketers, although the COVID-19 pandemic led to a surge in virtual events and webinars as a replacement for their in-person counterparts (Ballantine, 2021).

The arrival of the internet revolutionized B2B marketing, opening new avenues for reaching and engaging with potential customers. Early digital strategies included websites, email marketing and online advertising. Companies like Dell Technologies embraced the internet to create tailored online experiences for their business clients, and they also pioneered the use of email marketing in the B2B space, which quickly demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for targeted communication and relationship building. Once the internet became more familiar, businesses quickly started leveraging its reach for advertising purposes (Kushner, 2024).

The 2000s witnessed a significant integration of technology into B2B marketing, further enhancing its capabilities. Cloud-based CRM (customer relationship management) solutions like Salesforce provided businesses with tools for efficient customer data management and personalized marketing. Marketing automation platforms like ExactTarget and Pardot emerged, offering tools for creating and managing email campaigns, lead generation, and nurturing. SiriusDecisions introduced the Demand Waterfall in 2002, which provided a framework for measuring marketing ROI (return on investment) in the B2B world. ITMSA's David Munn introduced ABM (account-based marketing) in 2004, emphasizing targeted marketing efforts towards specific high value accounts (Kushner, 2024).

New dimensions were brought to B2B marketing in the mid-2000's-2010s with the emergence of social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Seeing their potential, companies started using social media for brand building, networking, and engaging with their target audience in a much more interactive way. The 2010s also saw the development of marketing automation platforms, with the growth of all-in-one platforms like HubSpot and Salesforce, as well as specialized platforms like Marketo (lead management, email marketing) and Eloqua (marketing automation, analytics). Leveraging sophisticated data analytics, companies were able to deliver increasingly personalized content and marketing messages (Kushner, 2024; Leadseed, 2024).

The current era of B2B marketing is characterized by an intense focus on customer experience. Companies are using data analytics and AI to craft highly personalized marketing messages tailored to individual customer preferences, emphasizing one-to-one selling. Sales professionals are also leveraging social media platforms to build relationships, share content, and engage with

potential leads. Social media management platforms like Hootsuite and Sprinklr have emerged to help manage multiple channels, allowing for efficient scheduling, engagement, and analytics. Marketing media has also expanded to video, with webinars, explainer videos and virtual events becoming popular for conveying complex information and engaging audiences (Deveau et al., 2023).

### **2.3 The History of Artificial Intelligence**

AI as a concept can be traced back to ancient times, with myths and stories about inanimate objects with intelligence. However, the foundation for modern AI was laid in the 19th and 20th centuries with advancements in mathematics and computing. Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace designed the Analytical Engine in the 1830s, considered the first design for a programmable machine. Lovelace, who is widely recognized as the first computer programmer, saw this machine performing operations far beyond calculations. This laid the groundwork for algorithmic thinking. Alan Turing, who is known for his work in breaking the Enigma code during World War II, made his own significant contributions to the field in the 1930s with his concept of a universal machine that would be able to simulate any other machine. This concept was crucial to the development of digital computers, which were a prerequisite for AI. The 1940s saw significant contributions from John Von Neumann, who conceived the architecture for the stored-program computer. Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts made a proposal for a model of artificial neurons, leading to the development of neural networks (Craig et al., 2024).

The year 1956 is widely considered the birth year of AI as a field of study. A Dartmouth College conference funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency brought together leading figures like Marvin Minsky, John McCarthy, and others. It was at this conference where John McCarthy coined the term "artificial intelligence". Allen Newell and Herbert A. Simon presented the Logic Theorist, considered the first AI program, capable of proving mathematical theorems. This was followed by the General Problem Solver algorithm in 1957, which laid the groundwork for more complex cognitive architectures (Craig et al., 2024).

The Dartmouth conference sparked optimism and substantial funding for AI research. Researchers believed that creating human-level intelligence was within reach. Notable achievements during the 1960s included the development of Lisp, a programming language for AI, and ELIZA, an early natural language processing program that paved the way for modern chatbots. However, by the 1970s, limitations in computing power and the complexity of the task led to a decline in funding and interest, with the same kind of setback occurring in the late 1980s due to the limitations and high costs of expert systems, which were rule-based programs that tried to replicate human intelligence

in a top-down approach. These systems performed well in areas that could be formalized but failed in areas requiring learning from data, such as image recognition (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 3-4).

In the mid-1990s, the combination of increased computing power and data availability led to an AI resurgence, where the focus shifted to machine learning and deep learning techniques. A significant milestone was the victory of Deep Blue, an IBM chess program, over world champion Garry Kasparov in 1997. This event, along with other advancements, dispelled the notion that machines could never surpass humans in complex games (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 4).

The 2020s have been marked by the rise of generative AI, capable of creating new content from user prompts. The release of image generators DALL-E 2 and Midjourney in 2022 and the public launch of ChatGPT in late 2022 brought generative AI to the forefront of public attention. These tools showcased the ability of AI to generate realistic images, write human-quality text, and engage in complex conversations, sparking both excitement and concerns about the future impact of AI. Generative AI is still evolving, with challenges like "hallucinations" (generating incorrect or nonsensical information) and the search for practical applications. However, these advancements have undoubtedly ushered in a new era in AI, bringing its potential and challenges to the forefront of global discussions (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 4-6; Toloka, 2023).

## **2.4 Theoretical Summary: The Integration of AI in B2B Marketing**

The integration of AI into B2B marketing represents a significant shift, enabling businesses to move beyond traditional methods and leverage technology for enhanced efficiency, personalization, and customer engagement. This integration is not a singular event but rather a gradual process marked by different stages, each characterized by the adoption of new technologies and approaches (Deveau et al., 2023).

The early stages of this integration began in the 1990's-2000's. The advent of the internet marked the initial onset of digital technologies into B2B marketing. This period saw the focus transition from primarily sales-driven activities to a more integrated approach involving digital marketing strategies. In the early 2000's, the widespread adoption of CRM systems and marketing automation tools enabled businesses to manage customer data efficiently and personalize interactions, marking a significant step towards data-driven B2B marketing (Kushner, 2024).

As AI technologies matured, B2B marketers began leveraging their potential for data analysis, predictive modeling, and process automation. This integration empowered businesses to gain deeper insights into customer behavior, optimize marketing campaigns, and personalize customer experiences at scale. The current B2B marketing landscape is characterized by a strong emphasis on personalization and customer experience. AI and machine learning play a crucial role in

achieving this by enabling hyper-personalized content delivery, dynamic audience segmentation, and intelligent chatbots for enhanced customer interaction. Social selling, fueled by platforms like LinkedIn, has also gained prominence, allowing sales professionals to leverage social media for lead generation and relationship building (Kushner, 2024).

The future of B2B marketing will likely witness an even deeper integration of AI, encompassing emerging technologies like augmented reality, virtual reality, and the Internet of Things. (McGuire, 2024). AI is transforming B2B marketing and the way businesses operate and interact with customers in many ways. Productivity and efficiency are enhanced with AI-powered tools automating repetitive tasks, which in turn frees marketers to focus more on other tasks. AI also enables businesses to gather and analyze vast amounts of data, allowing for more personalized content delivery, targeted messaging, and customized customer journeys. This focus on personalization leads to enhanced customer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty. These tools also provide B2B marketers with valuable insights into customer behavior, campaign performance, and market trends. These data-driven insights empower businesses to make informed decisions regarding marketing strategies, resource allocation, and customer targeting. AI tools assist sales teams by automating lead qualification, providing real-time negotiation guidance, and generating personalized sales pitches. This integration of AI into the sales process leads to increased conversion rates, improved customer relationships, and ultimately, higher revenue (Kushner, 2024).

While the integration of AI offers numerous benefits, businesses must also consider potential risks. AI algorithms can perpetuate biases present in the training data, leading to discriminatory outcomes. It is crucial to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability in AI systems to avoid ethical pitfalls. AI systems rely on large datasets, raising concerns regarding data privacy and security. Businesses must prioritize data protection measures and comply with relevant regulations to maintain customer trust. As AI automates tasks traditionally performed by humans, there are concerns regarding job displacement. However, it is suggested that AI is more likely to augment human capabilities rather than replace them entirely. Businesses need to reskill and upskill their workforce to adapt to the changing demands of the AI-powered workplace (Deveau et al., 2023).

The successful integration of AI in B2B marketing requires a strategic approach that involves identifying relevant use cases, investing in appropriate technologies, and addressing ethical and practical considerations. Companies that embrace AI responsibly and strategically are poised to reap the significant benefits it offers, gaining a competitive advantage in the evolving landscape of B2B marketing.

### **3 Research Design & Implementation**

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used to investigate the integration of AI in B2B marketing. The chapter starts by providing a description of the participants and sampling technique, highlighting the reasoning for selecting employees from a single B2B marketing agency. Next, the chapter describes the qualitative research design employed to explore the topic, discussing the two primary data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and a survey. Finally, it explains the data analysis methodologies used to interpret the collected data, focusing on the benefits of thematic analysis in qualitative studies.

#### **3.1 Participants and Sampling**

This study uses a qualitative research design to deeply understand the experiences and perspectives of B2B marketing professionals regarding AI integration. The goal is to understand the topic in its real-world context, allowing for rich and nuanced data collection. Qualitative research enables the capturing of participant perspectives and interpretations, providing valuable insights into AI adoption in B2B marketing. For example, understanding the challenges faced by a B2B marketing agency in implementing AI-driven solutions or how they perceive the impact of AI on their client relationships requires a deep, context-specific understanding that qualitative research can provide.

The participants in this study are employees of a single Finland-based B2B marketing agency. This purposive sampling method ensures that all participants have direct experience with the topic under investigation, providing relevant and focused insights. In addition, it allows for company-specific recommendations to be made, tailored to the needs and concerns brought up in the research context (Pandey & Pandey, 2015, p. 54). The use of purposive sampling allows for the selection of participants who are knowledgeable and informative about the research topic, enhancing the study's credibility and depth of understanding. (Kothari, 2019, p. 59-60). Interviews were conducted with 4 participants. The survey was sent out to around 40 employees, of which 5 ultimately responded to the survey. There were two main criteria for the selection of participants: they work at the specific agency, and their role involves marketing.

#### **3.2 Data Collection and Management Methods**

This study employs two primary data collection methods, those being semi-structured interviews and a survey. This qualitative data collection is supplemented by an in-depth literature review to gain more context and a better understanding of the topic.

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees at the B2B marketing agency. This method provides a flexible and interactive approach to data collection, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. The open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews enables participants to elaborate on their responses, providing rich and detailed data that can capture the complexities of AI integration (Kothari, 2009, p. 97-100).

The interview questions (Appendix 1) were developed on the collective basis of theoretical findings from the literature review, as well as through existing knowledge gained through studies and work experience. The questions cover four main themes in addition to establishing a background for each interviewee and thus a context for their participation.

The first theme focuses on the practical aspects of AI integration in the interviewee's work. The questions investigate their frequency of AI use, the timeline of implementation, and specific tools adopted. This helps to understand the level of AI adoption within their organization and their hands-on experience with AI-powered solutions.

Following that, the second theme explores the influence of AI on the interviewee's daily work and strategic decisions. Questions examine the automation of tasks, the impact on team workflow, and AI's role in decision-making processes. This sheds light on how AI is changing the operational and strategic aspects of B2B marketing.

Then, the interview moves on to addressing the difficulties encountered in AI implementation and explores potential areas for enhancement. These questions encourage interviewees to share their challenges, suggest improvements, and identify tasks that may not benefit from AI tools. This feedback is essential for understanding the practical limitations and potential areas for growth in AI-driven B2B marketing.

Finally, there is a discussion that focuses on the anticipated evolution of AI in B2B marketing and addresses the ethical aspects of its use. These questions explore the interviewee's vision for the future role of AI, their organization's approach to ethical AI implementation, and their perspectives on broader industry concerns. This allows for insight into the long-term implications of AI in B2B marketing and highlights the importance of responsible AI development.

A survey with similar questions (Appendix 4) to the interviews was distributed to employees at the agency. The use of surveys allows for the collection of standardized data from a slightly larger sample size, providing a broader perspective on the research topic. The consistency of questions between the interviews and surveys enables the triangulation of data and enhances the study's reliability and validity (Pandey & Pandey, 2015, p. 84-88).

Participants of the study were all provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendices 2 and 5, for the interview and surveys respectively). The interviewees were also asked to provide explicit consent by reading the Consent Form (Appendix 3) and either signing it, or by acknowledging it and giving their consent by replying to the form via message. The information regarding privacy, anonymity and withdrawal of consent are detailed in the Participant Information Sheets.

The study (including both the interviews and survey) took place during a span of one month, that being October 2024. The interviews were conducted through Google Meet, which provided a recording of each interview. These interview recordings are stored in Google Drive until the thesis process is complete, after which they are deleted. Each interviewee consented to being recorded and were informed via the Interview Participant Information Sheet about their rights regarding withdrawal of consent. Two of the interviews were conducted in Finnish, and the other two in English. As per the Participant Information Sheet, the interviews remain anonymous.

The survey and the answers it yielded were hosted through Webropol, in accordance with Haaga-Helia's guidelines. Webropol provided an overview of the results, and so they remain within the platform. The survey was shared to the participants through the specific company's internal communication platform, Slack, accompanied by the Survey Participant Information Sheet. As per the information given to the participants, the results of the survey will be deleted once the thesis process is complete.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Methodologies**

The data collected from the interviews and surveys will be analysed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The use of thematic analysis is well-suited for qualitative studies that aim to explore complex themes and develop rich insights. The clear defining and naming of themes allows for seamlessly drawing connections to the study objectives (Pandey & Pandey, 2015, 75-77).

Chapter 4 discusses the results of the research specifically, with 4.2 outlining the identified themes and 4.3 diving deeper into interpreting the results of both the survey and interviews.

## **4 Findings and Insights**

This chapter focuses on analysing data gathered from interviews and surveys to gain insights into the integration of AI in the practices of B2B marketing. The research aimed to understand how B2B marketing professionals are incorporating AI tools and technologies into their work and to explore the perceived impact of AI on their practices, workflows, and decision-making processes.

The chapter will examine the data through thematic analysis, identifying key themes that emerge from the participants' responses. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings, the analysis will be presented in three distinct sections: Interview, Survey, and Combined Insights. The Interview section will provide a rich, qualitative exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives, drawing on direct quotes to illustrate their insights. The Survey section will complement this qualitative analysis with quantitative data, highlighting statistically significant patterns and trends observed in the survey responses. Finally, the Combined Insights section will synthesize the findings from both data sources, exploring areas of convergence and divergence in the participants' perspectives.

The chapter concludes by comparing the study's findings with existing literature on AI in marketing, B2B marketing trends, and digital transformation in organizations. This comparative analysis will situate the research within the broader academic discourse and highlight the unique contributions of the study to the understanding of AI's role in the evolving landscape of B2B marketing.

### **4.1 Participant Profile**

As mentioned, all participants are employees at the same B2B marketing agency based in Finland. In total, there were four interviews conducted, as well as five surveys collected. The participants represent a range of roles within the marketing field, including content marketing strategists, growth marketing specialists, team leads, and marketing strategists. They all possess significant experience, ranging from three years to 15 years or more in marketing, suggesting a widespread adoption of AI across various levels of expertise and responsibility. Crucially, they are actively engaging with AI, both embracing its potential and cautiously navigating its challenges. They represent a generation of marketers at the forefront of AI integration, striving to find a balance between leveraging technology and preserving the essential human elements of their profession.

### **4.2 Interpretation of Results**

The study results, which include survey responses and interview transcripts from marketing professionals, provides a rich perspective on how artificial intelligence (AI) is being used and perceived in the B2B marketing industry. This section aims to synthesize the key takeaways from

the data, revealing the prominent trends and concerns surrounding AI's role in this field. The analysis will draw upon both data from the survey and qualitative insights from the interview transcripts.

#### **4.2.1 Interview**

This analysis examines four interview transcripts, comparing their responses to pre-determined questions and exploring key insights and themes. The interviews, while having a base list of questions, were conducted in a semi-structured way to facilitate a conversation that flowed from theme to theme naturally and allowed for relevant points to be brought up. The analysis is structured by question theme, logically highlighting general findings while maintaining the anonymity of participants.

When discussing each interviewee's path within marketing, the interviews showed a diverse range of entry points into marketing, from more structured educational paths to comparatively more organic transitions. This emphasizes the marketing field's capacity to attract talent from diverse backgrounds. One interviewee's career trajectory showed how roles can expand from content creation to strategic content planning, potentially fuelled by AI's growing influence in marketing. This suggests that AI might have a hand in reshaping job responsibilities, demanding a higher-level understanding and application of strategic and analytical skills. The diverse career journeys and the potential for AI to broaden marketing roles highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of the industry, requiring adaptability and continuous learning.

In terms of AI use in work, all interviewees reported incorporating AI into their daily or weekly workflows, underscoring AI's pervasive adoption in marketing practices. However, how AI is applied varies depending on an individual's role. For instance, those in client-facing roles utilize AI more frequently for a broader range of tasks, including content creation and automation of repetitive tasks. In contrast, those in less client-facing roles use AI primarily for internal purposes, such as crafting training materials or assisting with team management. While AI use is becoming standard in marketing, its specific applications are tailored to individual roles and responsibilities, highlighting the need for customized training and ethical guidelines across diverse teams.

ChatGPT is the most widely used AI tool, demonstrating its versatility and wide acceptance in marketing. However, various other AI tools are also mentioned, including Claude, Google Gemini, Google Notebook LM, and Grammarly, showcasing the rapid expansion of the AI ecosystem catering to diverse marketing needs. One interviewee underscores the potential of Google Notebook LM to generate audio overviews of websites, raising concerns and fascination regarding AI's capacity to mimic human-like communication. The AI toolkit available to marketers is rapidly

expanding, offering specialized solutions for various tasks. This necessitates staying informed about the capabilities and limitations of different tools to harness their full potential responsibly.

Some interviewees describe a smooth integration of AI into workflows. However, others acknowledge a learning curve and the importance of establishing proper usage practices. Data security concerns are common throughout the interviews, emphasizing the need for clear guidelines and training to guarantee responsible AI implementation, especially when dealing with sensitive client information. The user-friendly design of AI tools facilitates integration, but organizations must establish ethical guidelines and robust data security protocols to ensure responsible AI implementation.

None of the interviewees reported complete automation of any task. Instead, AI is often used to streamline processes, such as content ideation, outlining, gap analysis, data analysis, and generating first drafts for various marketing materials. This shift signifies that AI currently augments human abilities rather than replacing them, freeing marketers to focus on higher-level strategic thinking, creative direction, and refining AI-generated outputs. AI's current role is to support and enhance human capabilities in marketing, emphasizing the need for marketers to adapt their skill sets and embrace a collaborative approach to AI integration.

The impact of AI on teamwork is mixed. While AI can create a more relaxed environment by providing additional support for decision-making and brainstorming, concerns arise about quality control when external collaborators utilize AI without proper oversight. One interviewee highlights the potential for AI to hinder team brainstorming if individuals overly rely on AI in isolation, leading to decreased collaboration and creative synergy. Organizations must carefully consider the potential implications of AI on team dynamics, promoting a balanced approach that encourages collaboration and human interaction while harnessing AI's benefits. Clear guidelines and open communication are crucial to effectively managing AI's influence on team workflows.

Data security and potential misuse of client information remain prominent concerns. Several interviewees discussed the challenges of ensuring the accuracy and quality of AI-generated outputs, emphasizing the need for human review and editing to refine the content. The limitations of AI in replicating human creativity, emotional intelligence, and nuanced communication are also acknowledged, underscoring the value of human expertise in marketing.

While AI offers numerous benefits, its limitations must be acknowledged. Addressing ethical considerations, particularly data security and content authenticity remains paramount. Maintaining a balance between AI and human expertise is crucial to leveraging AI's strengths while mitigating weaknesses.

In discussing the future of AI, the interviewees envision AI evolving to enhance creativity and inspiration rather than displacing human expertise entirely. Specifically, they express interest in AI-driven content distribution strategies and the creation of animated videos, highlighting areas where AI can address current marketing challenges. One interviewee advocates for personalized AI tools tailored to specific organizational needs and data sets, showcasing a desire for more customized AI solutions. Marketers are optimistic about AI's potential to boost creativity and efficiency but emphasize the importance of human oversight and ethical considerations. The future of AI in marketing likely hinges on its ability to complement human skills and adapt to specific organizational contexts.

Transparency emerges as a key ethical consideration. Interviewees emphasized the importance of avoiding misleading clients by passing off AI-generated content as entirely human-created. They also highlighted the need for robust AI governance frameworks that address data security, ethical guidelines, and the wider societal impact of AI adoption. One interviewee underscored the importance of educating marketers about the potential risks and limitations of AI, advocating for a "step back" approach to critically assess new tools before implementation. Balancing innovation with responsible AI use requires a proactive approach. Organizations need to prioritize AI governance, transparency with clients, and thorough education on AI's ethical implications and security risks.

These interviews provide a multifaceted view of AI's impact on B2B marketing. The insights gleaned through analyzing the interviews reveal a shift towards AI-assisted work, where AI is primarily used for efficiency gains and as a supporter in data-driven decision-making. However, ethical concerns regarding data security, transparency, and the potential erosion of creativity remain top of mind, highlighting the importance of the "human" factor.

#### **4.2.2 Survey**

The previous analysis of in-depth interviews with marketing professionals provided rich qualitative insights into the adoption, applications, and perceived impact of AI in B2B marketing. This section expands on these findings by examining survey data collected from 5 more professionals working in the same B2B marketing agency.

When asked about the frequency of AI use, 80% of respondents reported using AI tools in some of their tasks, while 20% integrated AI into most of their tasks. Notably, no respondents reported using AI in all their tasks, indicating a degree of selectivity in AI application. The most used tools were free versions of ChatGPT and Claude, primarily for content creation and idea generation. Other tools mentioned include Fireflies for transcription and Google's NotebookLM, as well as

ChatGPT for advice, copywriting, translations, and creating summaries, and Cockatoo for transcribing and speeding up article writing.

The integration of AI appears largely experimental and opportunistic, with marketers using AI when they encounter a specific need for efficiency or creativity. One respondent mentioned using AI for both initial ideation and refining near-final drafts, while another respondent described incorporating AI by seeking its approach to a new task or requesting improvements to existing work. No respondents reported complete automation of any marketing tasks. When asked about efficiency, one respondent noted interestingly that perceived efficiency gains can sometimes be superficial, as prompting and refining AI-generated outputs can be time-consuming.

In terms of the effect of AI on workflow within teams, the main impact was pointed out as being on the initial stages of workflows, such as idea generation, drafting, and optimization, allowing teams to overcome creative blocks and quickly generate alternative options for customer presentations. One respondent, working independently, mentioned that AI offered alternative viewpoints and feedback on their thinking, helping to surface new ideas.

According to respondents, AI has influenced decision-making in more of a supportive role rather than as a primary decision-maker. AI helps by providing more alternatives and perspectives, facilitating a more informed decision-making process, and one respondent even emphasized using AI as a "sparring partner" and a source of insights outside their expertise. Another respondent noted that while AI influences smaller decisions, such as SEO optimization, it doesn't play a role in major decisions like budget allocation or strategy development.

Quite a few challenges were brought up by respondents as ones they have faced in their work. Some of the highlighted ones were limitations of free tools restricting use cases and experimentation, difficulty in determining appropriate tasks for AI application, and difficulties with AI's use of the Finnish language, which is relevant here as the participants are all employees at a B2B marketing agency based in Finland. Other concerns brought up were lack of transparency regarding the sources used by AI models, inaccurate information and potential for fabrication in AI-generated content, and the inability to use AI with customer data due to confidentiality and security concerns.

Suggested improvements include developing tools that retain context from previous discussions and the development of company-specific AI tools and data warehouses, as well as the ability to provide AI with more context, potentially including sensitive information, while maintaining security and confidentiality.

While AI has proved helpful in many ways, respondents acknowledged AI's limitations in tasks demanding human intuition, creativity, nuanced language understanding, and sensitivity to context. Specifically, they mentioned copywriting in Finnish and obtaining information on topics like EU legislation as areas where AI falls short.

Respondents anticipate a shift from experimentation to standardized workflows and deeper integration of AI, viewing it as a "personal creative partner." They predict an increased use for automation and development of helpful apps, potential for company-specific AI functions, and see a greater focus on AI audits for various aspects of marketing, from websites to campaigns.

There was a consensus among respondents that most organizations lack formal guidelines for ethical AI use. They also acknowledged the need for increased internal awareness and potential policies regarding AI. In terms of what their organization does, they cited encouraging quality content creation over quick and easy solutions, implementing practices regarding data uploaded to AI models, and avoiding the use of customer data when prompting AI.

A recurring theme when discussing AI use within the B2B marketing industry was the importance of maintaining human insights, creativity, and ethical considerations amidst the rapid advancements in AI technology. Concerns were expressed over potential job displacement due to AI's increasing capabilities and diminished quality of marketing content due to over-reliance on AI. Among these concerns were also potential misuse of confidential information through AI tools, the ethical implications of deep-fake technology and its impact on marketing, and the need for genuine value-added AI applications rather than indiscriminate implementation.

In terms of what the future holds and what they are eager to see, respondents expressed interest in personalized AI assistants, AI-powered video creation tools, and AI tools capable of understanding and acting upon spoken instructions or meeting recordings. One respondent highlighted the evolution of AI features in search engines, particularly Google's Search Generative Experience, and its potential impact on online search behavior. There was an emphasis on the need to balance innovation with responsible AI development and data security. Concerns were also raised about the potential for "fake innovation", where AI might lead to the proliferation of similar content lacking true value. In general, respondents advocated for prioritizing responsible use and considering ethical implications throughout AI development and implementation.

The survey data confirms the growing trend of AI integration, primarily to enhance efficiency and augment human capabilities. However, it also underscores the significant challenges and ethical considerations surrounding AI use, calling for industry-wide efforts to promote responsible development and implementation. By addressing these concerns, the B2B marketing industry can

harness the power of AI to drive innovation while upholding ethical standards and preserving the essential role of human creativity and expertise.

#### **4.2.3 Combined Insights and Themes Identified**

The findings of both the interview and survey suggest that B2B marketing is in a period of significant transformation as AI tools become more integrated into workflows. The studies reveal a range of perspectives and experiences, highlighting both the opportunities and anxieties surrounding AI adoption. While some marketers are enthusiastically embracing AI's potential, others express caution and emphasize the importance of responsible use. In general, four main themes can be identified:

##### **Theme 1: AI as a Supplemental Tool, not a Replacement**

Both the survey and interviews strongly emphasize that AI currently functions as a supplemental tool rather than a replacement for human marketers. Survey data shows limited full automation of tasks, and interviewees consistently describe AI as a "sparring partner," a source of additional insights, and a way to make certain tasks more efficient. This indicates that AI is utilized more in a supporting role. Across the studies, no one expresses a desire to be completely replaced by AI, and many emphasize the importance of human skills like creativity, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking in marketing.

##### **Theme 2: The Evolving Role of AI and the Need for Adapting**

While AI is currently a supplemental tool, there is a clear sense that its role is evolving rapidly, and that marketers and marketing agencies need to adapt. Survey respondents predict an increase in the use of AI for automation and application development, while interviewees discuss the need to develop consistent practices for integrating AI into workflows, and the importance of staying up-to-date with the latest tools and prompt engineering techniques. Both data sets indicate a shift from experimental and fragmented use of AI to more standardized and integrated applications in the future.

##### **Theme 3: Ethical Considerations and the Importance of Responsible Use**

Significant ethical considerations surrounding AI in marketing, particularly concerning data privacy and the potential for misuse, are emphasized throughout the study. There is a clear lack of formal ethical guidelines in most organizations, although some practices are emerging. Concerns about the potential for job displacement and the leakage of confidential information are also evident. Interviewees express anxieties about the responsible use of AI, particularly the potential for AI-

generated content to lack originality or authenticity. The need for greater transparency around AI use and the development of clear ethical guidelines is a recurring concern.

#### Theme 4: AI's Impact on Marketing Skills and the Value of Human Expertise

The integration of AI is prompting a re-evaluation of essential marketing skills, emphasizing the enduring value of human expertise in a technology-driven landscape. Interviewees highlight the need for marketers to develop skills in prompt engineering, fact-checking, critical thinking, and discerning AI-generated content. There is a continuing emphasis on the importance of uniquely human skills such as storytelling, building relationships with clients, understanding customer needs and context, and effectively communicating with people. Several interviewees suggest that AI will not replace human marketers entirely but will instead complement their existing skills and create new opportunities for marketers who can adapt and evolve.

Overall, these combined insights suggest that the B2B marketing industry is navigating a period of significant transformation as AI becomes increasingly prevalent. While AI offers considerable potential to enhance efficiency and unlock new possibilities, it also presents ethical challenges and raises questions about the evolving role of human marketers. Successfully navigating this transition will require marketers to embrace lifelong learning, prioritize responsible AI development and use, and focus on leveraging human expertise in areas where AI falls short.

### **4.3 Bridging Theory and Practice: Comparison with Existing Literature**

This section compares the insights gained from the survey and interview analyses with the existing literature on AI in B2B marketing to provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI's current and potential influence on the field. By examining how the data aligns with, expands upon, and potentially challenges established theories, this comparison aims to offer practical guidance for navigating the evolving landscape of AI-driven marketing. This section is structured according to the themes identified in the previous section.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: AI as a Supplemental Tool, not a Replacement**

The data strongly reinforces the prevailing view in the literature that AI is currently best utilized as a tool to enhance human capabilities, not replace them. Both the survey and interviews consistently portray AI as a valuable assistant that can boost efficiency and unlock new possibilities, but ultimately remains under human control. For instance, survey respondents primarily use AI for tasks like reflecting on decisions, generating content, and providing recommendations, indicating a reliance on human judgment and oversight. This aligns with sources like McKinsey (Deveau et al.

2023) which posit that AI can automate certain sales-team functions but emphasize the importance of human connection and strategic decision-making.

However, the interview data offers a more nuanced understanding of AI's supplemental role, going beyond the literature's focus on task automation. Interviewees describe AI as a "sparring partner" that helps generate ideas, confirm existing knowledge, and structure their thinking. This suggests that AI can also serve as a collaborative thought partner, pushing marketers to think differently and explore new creative avenues. Such applications highlight AI's potential to augment not just operational efficiency but also strategic and creative processes within marketing.

Participants in the studies raise the possibility that certain aspects of marketing, such as capturing human creativity and building genuine relationships, may remain beyond AI's reach. This perspective challenges the notion, explored in some academic discussions, that AI could eventually achieve full human-level intelligence. While the literature acknowledges limitations in current AI capabilities (Craig et al. 2024), the interview data emphasizes the enduring value of uniquely human qualities that may be difficult to replicate through algorithms. This tension between AI's expanding capabilities and the inherent value of human expertise highlights the importance of finding a balance between automation and human intervention.

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: The Evolving Role of AI and the Need for Adapting**

The data resonates with the literature's emphasis on the rapid evolution of AI and its transformative impact on business practices. Both the survey and interviews reflect an awareness that AI is not a static entity but a constantly evolving force that requires marketers to adapt and learn continuously. Survey respondents anticipate an increase in AI usage in the coming years, particularly for automation and new application development. This aligns with industry analyses that predict the continued expansion of AI across various marketing functions (McGuire, 2024).

While the literature often frames adaptation in general terms, the interview data offers concrete examples of how B2B marketers are actively adjusting their workflows and skill sets. Interviewees discuss experimenting with different AI platforms and tools, refining their prompt engineering techniques, and developing standardized procedures for integrating AI into existing processes. These examples showcase the practical implementation of the adaptive strategies discussed in the literature, highlighting the importance of staying informed about new tools and techniques.

The interviews also point towards emerging AI applications, such as AI-driven content distribution and personalized virtual assistants, which are not yet widely discussed in the literature. This suggests that the data may be leading the theoretical discourse in some areas, highlighting the

dynamic nature of this field. The rapidly evolving capabilities of AI necessitate continuous research and exploration to understand its full potential and inform practices for its application.

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Ethical Considerations and the Importance of Responsible Use**

The data strongly supports the literature's concerns about the ethical implications of AI, particularly regarding data privacy and potential misuse (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 6-9). The survey highlights a lack of formal ethical guidelines in many organizations, mirroring the literature's call for clearer regulations and frameworks (Craig et al., 2024). Interviewees echo these concerns, expressing anxieties about the responsible use of AI-generated content, potential bias in algorithms, and the need for transparency with clients

The interviews further enrich the theoretical discussion by providing real-world examples of the ethical dilemmas faced by B2B marketers. For example, interviewees grapple with the question of authenticity when using AI-generated content, questioning whether to disclose its use and how to ensure the content aligns with their brand values. These practical considerations offer valuable insights for developing ethical guidelines that address the specific challenges faced by marketers on the ground.

The study results' focus on ethical customer experiences directly resonates with the literature's emphasis on customer-centric marketing. The potential for AI to erode trust through inauthentic content or misuse of customer data underscores the need for responsible implementation. This alignment highlights the importance of grounding ethical discussions in practical considerations related to maintaining positive customer relationships and fostering trust (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 80-83).

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: AI's Impact on Marketing Skills and the Value of Human Expertise**

The empirical data aligns with the literature's prediction that the integration of AI will necessitate a shift in required marketing skills, while simultaneously emphasizing the enduring value of human expertise (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 7-9). The survey reveals an anticipation of changes in marketing roles, while interviewees highlight the need for new skills such as prompt engineering, fact-checking, and critically evaluating AI-generated output. This reflects the literature's discussion of the evolving skill sets required for effective AI utilization (Craig et al., 2024).

The interviews offer concrete examples of how AI is prompting marketers to reassess and refine their skills. The ability to discern the limitations of AI and identify instances where human intervention is necessary becomes paramount. For example, interviewees stress the importance of

applying human judgment when interpreting AI-generated insights and recognizing situations where creativity and emotional intelligence are essential.

This emphasis on human skills aligns with broader marketing principles discussed in the literature, such as understanding the buyer's journey, building customer relationships, and crafting compelling narratives. AI may augment these skills, but it does not diminish their importance. The research collectively suggests that the future of marketing lies in finding a synergy between human ingenuity and AI capabilities, leveraging both to create more effective and ethically sound marketing strategies.

## 5 Discussion

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study gained through interviews, surveys and theoretical research, exploring their implications for the future of B2B marketing in an era so clearly defined by AI. While the previous chapter outlined the findings, the aim of this chapter is to place those findings more clearly into the context of the study objectives. The research sought to understand how B2B marketing professionals are integrating AI tools into their work, as well as the perceived and felt impacts of the integration. The study's methodology involved a mixed approach of gathering qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with professionals at a Finland-based B2B marketing agency, as well as an in-depth survey that was distributed at the same agency.

The current landscape of B2B marketing is defined by a fast evolution of AI technologies, along with which comes a crucial need to understand the ways these tools reshape industry practices and influence the skills needed for success. Comparing the findings of the study with existing literature helps to highlight areas of convergence, divergence and potential areas where real-life experiences might be evolving faster than theoretical information. This comparative approach underscores the value of this research, in a way that helps bridge the gap between theoretical understandings of AI and its practices utilized in B2B marketing

### 5.1 Implications for B2B Marketing

The findings from this study offer many valuable insights into the part AI plays in B2B marketing, and what its implications are for marketers. The data shows that while AI is currently viewed primarily in a supporting role that enhances efficiency and supplements human capabilities, that role is rapidly evolving. The research confirms that the integration of AI is not just about task automation, but it represents a paradigm shift in how marketers approach their work. There is a demand for new skills, ethical considerations, and a deeper understanding of what AI can do and what its limitations are. This aligns with the broader trend of digital evolution impacting businesses across industries.

One of the key implications of AI for B2B marketing is a shifting skillset need. Because of AI's widespread integration, marketers need to place more emphasis on skills like prompt engineering, data analysis, and critical evaluation of AI-generated content. This shift represents the growing importance of data literacy and the ability to implement AI tools effectively. Successful AI integration also requires a strategic approach, aligning AI tools with specific marketing goals and ensuring a smooth integration of these tools into existing processes. This involves developing clear internal guidelines regarding these implementations.

The use of AI in marketing raises ethical concerns, particularly when it comes to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential for misleading or even harmful content. Marketers need to be aware of these ethical implications in order to effectively prioritize responsible AI use. This means establishing ethical guidelines, ensuring transparency with clients, and focusing on the genuine value that AI can bring to their work.

## **5.2 Challenges and Opportunities of AI**

While AI brings about many benefits and opportunities, these are also met by significant challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges largely have to do with the lack of information and understanding around AI.

There is currently a lack of widely accepted ethical guidelines for the use of AI in marketing. This raises concerns about potential misuse and highlights the need for responsible implementation strategies. There are also concerns regarding data privacy and the potential for breaches or misuse, as AI systems often rely on a lot of data.

As AI becomes more sophisticated, marketers need to develop new skills to keep up with its evolution. To efficiently utilize gen-AI, marketers need to develop their prompt-engineering skills. In addition, they need to learn how to analyse data with a critical eye, to effectively use these tools. This can create a skill gap and require investments in training and development. There is a risk that marketers may rely too heavily on AI, leading to a decline in critical thinking skills and creativity. Furthermore, AI can generate inaccurate or biased content, needing careful verification and adjustment to ensure accuracy, fairness, and alignment with brand values. Because of this, it remains crucial to maintain a balance between human expertise and AI assistance.

The study highlighted multiple opportunities that AI brings to B2B marketing. One of the most significant is the improvements it brings to efficiency. AI can automate repetitive tasks such as data entry and analysis, and these tools also have the capability to analyse large sets of data to identify patterns and trends that might be missed by the human eye. All of this gives marketers the space to make strategic data-driven decisions and focus on more important tasks, which can significantly improve productivity and efficiency.

AI can help marketers overcome creative blocks and explore different approaches to tasks. Gen-AI has become a crucial sparring partner when it comes to ideating content and getting different perspectives. Gen-AI also enables the exploration of new content creating channels, such as video and image generation, which opens up new ways to create engaging content.

### **5.3 Ethical Considerations**

The study highlights several ethical considerations surrounding the use of AI in B2B marketing, emphasizing the need for responsible development and implementation to ensure that AI is used ethically and does not have negative consequences

One primary concern is data privacy and security, as AI relies heavily on data, including potentially sensitive customer information. The results of the interviews emphasized the importance of solid data security protocols and compliance with relevant regulations to keep data safe and thus, maintain trust. The need for transparency and disclosure regarding the use of AI in marketing was also highlighted, with advocacy for open communication with clients about the role of AI in content creation and data analysis.

Further ethical considerations include the potential for bias and discrimination arising from biased training data, and concerns about the lacking authenticity and originality of AI-generated content. These concerns emphasize the need for human oversight and editing, to ensure that the generated content aligns with brand values.

Finally, there were concerns acknowledged regarding job displacement due to the increasing capabilities of AI. However, the general consensus remains that AI is more likely to augment human capabilities rather than replace human marketers entirely. This highlights a shift in the skillsets necessary to be successful, and stresses the importance of human skills like creativity, emotional intelligence, and relationship building. A balanced approach needs to be developed that can leverage all the opportunities that AI brings while still preserving the value of human expertise.

### **5.4 Recommendations for Practitioners**

Based on the findings of the study, combined with insights gleaned from available sources, there are a few recommendations that B2B marketers should consider in order to make the most of AI. Firstly, as emphasized many times over in this thesis, is the development of clear internal guidelines for responsible and ethical use of AI. Without these guidelines, there is no consistency or clear understanding of what is and is not appropriate. Once these guidelines have been developed, a company-wide onboarding should be held to ensure that everyone is on the same page

AI is constantly evolving, and in order to keep up, marketers need to stay on top of the latest tools and techniques. Implementing an ongoing training program or at the very least, repeating information sessions regarding this topic, will allow for marketing teams to most effectively

leverage the tools that are available. This also means continuously evaluating and experimenting with different tools and platforms to determine which ones are the best fit for specific companies.

## **5.5 Reflection**

This research provides valuable insights into the integration of AI in B2B marketing. The study reveals that AI is primarily viewed as a supplemental tool that enhances efficiency and augments human capabilities, aligning with existing views that AI's current strength lies in supporting rather than replacing human marketers. However, acknowledging its limitations is essential for enhancing the study's credibility and for informing future research.

This section reflects on the study. First, it examines the results yielded through the lens of the outlined study objectives, looking at how successfully the study was able to meet said objectives. Following that is a discussion on the ethics and reliability of the conducted study, which is crucial to validating the results and emphasizing that the study was conducted in an appropriate way. This section is concluded by a learning reflection, evaluating the learning and development from the perspective of the thesis' author.

### **5.5.1 Revisiting the Study Objectives**

The objectives outlined for this study in the first chapter aim to provide a thorough understanding of AI integration in B2B marketing processes, particularly within the context of a Finland-based B2B marketing agency. These main objectives are understanding current AI practices and the attitudes regarding it, navigating the past and current B2B and AI landscapes, exploring the safe and ethical AI implementation, and identifying potential improvements.

To understand how AI is currently being utilized and what opinions and concerns marketers have regarding it, research was conducted among marketers at a Finland-based B2B marketing agency to identify core practices and feelings. The data revealed that gen-AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Claude, are being used for a variety of tasks that include content creation, idea generation, data analysis and workflow optimization. In general, AI is being used mainly as a supplemental tool to enhance efficiency and support human decision-making and skills, rather than replacing human marketers entirely. Attitudes expressed regarding AI ranged from enthusiasm about its potential to caution about its limitations and ethical implications.

This thesis traces the history of both AI and B2B marketing in order to lay the groundwork for understanding the current landscapes. B2B marketing has its early roots in the 1800s with industrial magazines and trade shows. As the internet emerged, digital strategies like email marketing and online advertising started to replace traditional marketing efforts. By the 2000s,

technology became more deeply integrated with cloud-based CRM systems and marketing automation platforms. Now, B2B marketing utilizes AI in various processes throughout the industry (Ballantine, 2021).

Significant process was made in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in mathematics and computing, which laid the foundation for what AI is today. The 1956 Dartmouth College conference marked the official beginning of AI as a field of study. Advancements in programming languages and early natural language processing programs were developed. AI research faced setbacks due to limitations in computing power but saw a resurgence in the mid-1990s with the rise of machine learning and deep learning techniques. The 2000s brought about innovations like Google's search engine and Amazon's recommendation engine, leading to the current era of AI where generative AI like ChatGPT and DALL-E can generate human-quality text and images (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 4-6; Toloka, 2023).

This study recognizes the crucial need for ethical considerations in AI adoption. In the data gathered through the interviews and survey, there is a strong emphasis on ethical concerns related to AI integration in B2B marketing. The results emphasize the importance of data privacy and security, transparency in AI use, responsible content creation, and addressing potential bias in algorithm. A recurring theme is the need for organizations to develop clear ethical guidelines and practices for AI implementation to ensure responsible use and mitigate potential risks.

Potential improvements identified through the study include developing more robust ethical guidelines, addressing data security concerns, improving AI capabilities in specific areas like Finnish language processing, and creating company-specific AI tools and data warehouses.

### **5.5.2 The Ethics and Reliability of the Research**

This section examines the ethical considerations and reliability of the research conducted in this study, highlighting both its strengths and limitations. Exploration of these aspects provides a comprehensive understanding of the study's contributions to the evolving topic of AI in B2B marketing.

This study demonstrates a commitment to ethical research practices by including clearly defined Participant Information Sheets and consent guidelines. As seen in appendices 2, 3 and 5, the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw consent is clearly stated. This was done to ensure transparency and to ensure that participants were adequately informed and prepared. There is also clear information provided that explicitly states that answers provided will remain anonymous. The interviewees were informed of this during the interviews and through the Interview Participant Information Sheet, and no personal data was collected at any point during the

survey. This approach ensures participant privacy and mitigates potential risks associated with disclosing sensitive information. A general overview of data handling and disposal procedures was provided, and the participants were provided with contact information, should they require more information.

Both semi-structured interviews and a survey were utilized for data collection, which enhances reliability through data triangulation. Comparing the qualitative insights from interviews with the data from surveys allows for a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the research topic.

The research design and implementation is clearly outlined, detailing participant and sampling information, data collection methods, as well as data analysis methods. This transparency allows for scrutiny of the research process. Pre-existing sources are referenced when relevant and helps to ground the study in addition to giving it credibility.

The study focuses on participants from a single B2B marketing agency in Finland, using purposive sampling to ensure all participants have direct experience with AI integration in a B2B context. While this limits generalizability, it allows for in-depth exploration of a specific context, providing valuable insights for the specific company. This enables the opportunity to observe the results of this study in practice.

There is a heavy reliance on participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions in this study. While valuable, self-reported data can be subjective and potentially influenced by individual biases. Future explorations of the topic might consider diversifying the sample in order to gain more generalized insights. In addition, more objective research methods would strengthen the applicability of results.

### **5.5.3 Learning Reflection**

This reflection examines the thesis writing experience, as well as the author's feelings regarding its execution. Overall, the thesis process was a journey of discovery, allowing for building upon a base of knowledge and experience regarding AI and marketing, in a context that is interesting and relevant to the author's career path. This thesis provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of AI's integration into the B2B landscape and provides valuable insights that the B2B marketing agency this thesis focuses on can implement into their practices.

As AI becomes increasingly widespread, it is imperative that we learn to use it in an ethical and responsible way. While it opens up many doors and makes many processes more streamlined and efficient, it remains important that it is used in a sustainable way to mitigate risks.

The discussions that were had during the interviews gave quite a few profound insights. Speaking directly to marketers about the topic, going beyond theoretical research and hearing their first-hand accounts brought up a lot of new perspectives. They allowed for an in-depth exploration of the challenges and opportunities associated with AI, which was incredibly valuable in drawing conclusions based on the study in order to inform the recommendations for practitioners. The conversations regarding ethics of AI use were of particular interest.

The biggest challenge during the thesis-writing process was maintaining a common thread throughout the work. As there is such a wide range of information available and so many insights that were gained throughout the study, it was a constant work in progress to keep everything streamlined and relevant to the study objectives.

This thesis sets a solid foundation of knowledge regarding AI and B2B marketing, and further builds upon that base with valuable research that highlights the thoughts and perspectives surrounding the topic. It then discusses these findings clearly and allows for conclusions to be drawn and recommendations to be made in a way that makes sense.

## 6 Conclusion

This study highlights that the B2B marketing industry is amidst a significant transformation driven by the rapid evolution and adoption of AI. While it offers significant potential to enhance efficiency and function as a supplementary tool to marketers, it also presents ethical challenges and raises the need for a re-evaluation of essential marketing skills. The future of B2B marketing lies in finding a balance between human ingenuity and AI capabilities. This involves embracing constant learning, prioritizing responsible AI use, and focusing on leveraging human expertise. By being strategic about the integration of AI, navigating ethical considerations, and being open-minded, B2B marketers can use AI to drive innovation and achieve sustainable success in a constantly changing landscape so heavily affected by technology.

As Anita Nielsen, president of LDK advisory, said, “The reality is that being unprepared is a choice. The benefits come when we see AI as a tool, not a terror, and bring it into our sales motions” (Mandala, 2024).

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

1. What work do you do, and how long have you been doing it?
2. How did you get into marketing?
3. How often do you use AI in your work?
4. When did you start implementing AI in your work?
5. What specific AI tools have you adopted in your B2B marketing strategy? What are their key features?
6. How do these AI tools integrate with your work?
7. Which marketing tasks (if any) in your work have been automated using AI? How has this affected the efficiency of your operations?
8. Can you describe how AI has affected the workflow within your marketing team?
9. Has AI affected decision-making in your work? If so, how?
10. What challenges have you faced when using AI in your work? Are there any improvements you feel could be done?
11. Are there any aspects of your work that you don't feel would benefit from the use of AI tools?
12. How do you see the role of AI evolving in your marketing practices in the next few years?
13. How does your organization ensure that AI is used ethically in your marketing practices?
14. What are your thoughts regarding AI use in your industry? Are there any concerns?
15. What AI technologies are you most interested in seeing the development of? Is there a specific example?
16. What are your thoughts on balancing innovation and responsible AI use in B2B marketing?

## Appendix 2. Interview Participant Information Sheet

### Participant Information Sheet

**Title of the Thesis:** The Use of Artificial Intelligence in B2B Marketing Processes

**Student's Name:** Ella Nyström

**Objective of Data Collection:** To gain insights into the use of artificial intelligence and opinions regarding its use in B2B marketing operations.

**Method and Phases of Data Collection:** Interview (Google Meet, recorded)

**Duration of Participation:** 45 minutes

**Pre-preparation:** No pre-preparation is required to participate in a study.

**Benefits of Participation for the Participant or their Represented Organization:** Processing, storage, access and disposal of the data: the data will be processed and analyzed using the services provided by Haaga-Helia. The data will be disposed of once the study is complete. The study does not ask for any personal data. All answers will remain anonymous.

**Publication of Results:** The thesis report will be published in the Theseus online library.

**Voluntary participation and withdrawal of consent:** Participation in the interview is voluntary. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during the interview. Once results are processed and analyzed, consent can no longer be withdrawn.

The above-mentioned content of Participant Information sheet explains in an understandable way what the research is about, what participation means, what the data will be used for and how it will be stored. Contact details and the opportunity to ask questions and get answers to questions have been given to the respondents.

### Appendix 3. Interview Participant Consent Form

#### Participant Consent

Name of the study: The Use of Artificial Intelligence in B2B Marketing Processes

The author of the study: Ella Nyström, Haaga-Helia UAS

With my signature, I confirm that I give my consent to participate in the research.

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Name of the Consent Giver

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Date

Signature

## Appendix 4. Survey Questions

1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and give my consent to participate in the study in accordance with the research announcement.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No. To complete this form, you must give your consent.
2. How often do you use AI in your work?
  - a. I use AI tools in all of my tasks
  - b. I use AI tools in most of my tasks
  - c. I use AI tools in some of my tasks
  - d. I use AI tools in a few of my tasks
  - e. I do not use AI tools
3. What specific AI tools have you adopted in your B2B marketing strategy? What are their key features?
4. How do these tools integrate with your work?
5. Which marketing tasks (if any) in your work have been automated using AI? How has this affected the efficiency of your operations+
6. Can you describe how AI has affected the workflow within your marketing team?
7. Has AI affected decision-making in your work? If so, how?
8. What challenges have you faced when using AI in your work? Are there any improvements you feel could be done?
9. Are there any aspects of your work that you don't feel would benefit from the use of AI tools?
10. How do you see the role of AI evolving in your marketing practices in the next few years?
11. How does your organization ensure that AI is used ethically in your marketing practices?
12. What are your thoughts regarding AI use in your industry?
13. What AI technologies are you most interested in seeing the development of? Is there a specific example?
14. What are your thoughts on balancing innovation and responsible AI use in B2B marketing?
15. If any other thoughts or insights came to mind but you didn't get a chance to share them, please do so here:

## Appendix 5. Survey Participant Information Sheet

### Participant Information Sheet

**Title of the Thesis:** The Use of Artificial Intelligence in B2B Marketing Processes

**Student's Name:** Ella Nyström

**Objective of Data Collection:** To gain insights into the use of artificial intelligence and opinions regarding its use in B2B marketing operations.

**Method and Phases of Data Collection:** Online survey

**Duration of Participation:** 20-30 minutes

**Pre-preparation:** No pre-preparation is required to participate in a study.

**Benefits of Participation for the Participant or their Represented Organization:** Processing, storage, access and disposal of the data: the data will be processed and analyzed using the services provided by Haaga-Helia. The data will be disposed of after the study is complete. The survey does not ask for any personal data.

**Publication of Results:** The thesis report will be published in the Theseus online library.

**Voluntary participation and withdrawal of consent:** Participation in the survey is voluntary. [For Webropol surveys: please note that consent to participate in the survey cannot be withdrawn after pressing the submit button, as individual responses are not identifiable from the data.]

The above-mentioned content of Participant Information sheet explains in an understandable way what the research is about, what participation means, what the data will be used for and how it will be stored. Contact details and the opportunity to ask questions and get answers to questions have been given to the respondents.