

When AI Acts: Rethinking Marketing Strategy, Decision Authority, and Value Creation

SPECIAL ISSUE

Guest Editors

*Maria Vernuccio, Francesca Checchinato,
Camilla Barbarossa, Riadh Ladhari*

CALL FOR PAPERS

Deadlines	
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Framing the Issue

A critical shift is underway in marketing: artificial intelligence is no longer limited to informing decisions; it is increasingly acting on them.

From automated campaign management driven by predictive and optimization algorithms to real-time pricing systems and generative AI-enabled customer interactions, firms are beginning to delegate not only analytical tasks but also executional and, in some cases, strategic choices to AI systems. At the same time, there is a clear shift from actions primarily focused on efficiency gains and reducing process time toward more advanced executional capabilities, where AI actively drives and implements decisions within business operations. This evolution challenges a foundational assumption of marketing, namely that strategy is ultimately formulated and enacted by human decision-makers.

While earlier research has emphasized the role of AI in enhancing analytics and automation (Davenport *et al.*, 2020; Wedel & Kannan, 2016), more recent developments, particularly in generative AI, large language models, and autonomous systems, point to a deeper transformation. AI is becoming embedded in the processes through which marketing strategy is continuously shaped, implemented, and refined (Chan & Choi, 2025; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; Grewal *et al.*, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2026; Verhoef *et al.*, 2021). At the same time, this transformation entails both opportunities and risks, as AI can enhance decision quality while introducing new forms of opacity, bias, and loss of control (Grewal *et al.*, 2021).

The central question, therefore, is how marketing strategy should evolve as decision-making and actions are increasingly shared with or delegated to autonomous and adaptive AI systems.

AI and the Reconfiguration of Marketing Decision-Making

As AI becomes integral to marketing processes, decision-making is evolving toward hybrid configurations in which managerial judgment interacts with algorithmic inference. These human-AI decision architectures, often powered by predictive models, recommender systems, and optimization engines, expand firms’ analytical capabilities while raising important challenges related to interpretability, control, and accountability (Kellogg *et al.*, 2020; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; Shrestha *et al.*, 2019).

These developments are also supported by emerging evidence on how firms build AI-enabled capabilities to support adaptive decision-making and innovation processes (Aker *et al.*, 2023; Sullivan & Fosso Wamba, 2024).

A key framework to interpret this transformation is provided by Huang and Rust (2021), who distinguish among mechanical, thinking, and feeling AI. Mechanical AI includes rule-based automation and execution systems. Thinking AI encompasses predictive analytics, machine learning models, and decision-support algorithms. Feeling AI refers to conversational agents, affective computing, and generative AI systems that support interactional and relational processes.

In contemporary marketing systems, these forms are increasingly integrated. Predictive and recommender systems inform targeting and pricing decisions, while generative and conversational AI shape customer engagement and content creation, jointly influencing decision-making across analytical, operational, and experiential domains.

Recent advances in agentic AI introduce a further shift. These systems are capable of autonomously pursuing goals, coordinating actions, and adapting strategies over time (Baird & Maruping, 2021; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2023). In marketing contexts, this may include systems that independently manage campaigns, orchestrate omnichannel interactions, or dynamically allocate resources across customer segments.

AI systems increasingly influence not only decision outcomes but also the informational and organizational contexts in which decisions are made (Kellogg *et al.*, 2020; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). This transition from decision support to autonomous decision enactment raises fundamental questions about how strategy is formulated, how decision authority is distributed, and how firms can effectively govern increasingly autonomous marketing systems.

Marketing Strategy in AI-Mediated Competitive Contexts

AI is transforming internal decision processes, thereby reshaping the competitive logic of marketing. Marketing outcomes such as brand awareness, brand equity, purchase, and consumer engagement are increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems, including recommender systems, search and ranking algorithms, and platform-based matching mechanisms embedded in digital infrastructures. These systems actively influence demand formation and competitive positioning (Kannan & Li, 2017; Verhoef *et al.*, 2021).

At the same time, the emergence of machine customers, defined as AI agents capable of autonomously searching, evaluating, and purchasing offerings, challenges established assumptions about customer behavior and market interaction (Gal & Elkin-Koren, 2017; Huang & Rust, 2021).

Taken together, these developments indicate that AI is not only affecting how firms act but also shaping how consumers make choices. Rather than merely improving efficiency, AI is enabling a reconfiguration of the marketing operating model, shifting firms from campaign-based execution to continuous, adaptive value-creation processes (Verhoef *et al.*, 2021).

In such contexts, marketing strategy increasingly involves designing and managing AI-mediated interaction systems, where value creation depends on the interplay between human and algorithmic agency, as well as on the coordination of predictive, generative, and agentic AI capabilities. This shift also reflects the growing importance of dynamic capabilities that enable firms to integrate data, AI, and organizational processes in response to rapidly evolving market conditions (Aker *et al.*, 2023; Brewis *et al.*, 2023).

Inclusive and Responsible Marketing Strategy

The increasing reliance on artificial intelligence in marketing reshapes decision-making and competitive dynamics, and reconfigures the structural conditions of market interaction.

As AI systems participate in and, in some cases, enact marketing decisions, questions of fairness, representation, and inclusion become embedded within the architecture of strategy itself. Algorithmic systems trained on historical and behavioral data, including predictive models and recommender systems, may reproduce or amplify existing biases in ways that are difficult to observe and control (Barocas *et al.*, 2019; Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019).

In this context, inclusion emerges as a constitutive dimension of AI-enabled marketing systems, as algorithmic decisions directly affect access to markets, customer representation, and exposure to value propositions.

These dynamics have clear strategic implications. Biased or non-inclusive systems can distort market access, undermine trust, and reduce long-term value creation (Martin & Murphy, 2017). At the same time, carefully designed AI systems, including adaptive targeting and personalization tools, can expand inclusion by improving the identification of underserved segments and enabling more responsive forms of market engagement (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023).

The challenge lies in embedding fairness and responsibility into the design of AI-enabled marketing systems, ensuring inclusion at the data, model, and decision-process levels.

Research Gap and Aim of the Special Issue

Despite the accelerating diffusion of artificial intelligence across marketing practice, the field's understanding of its strategic implications remains underdeveloped and conceptually fragmented, with limited integration of insights on AI-enabled capabilities and organizational transformation (Aker *et al.*, 2023; Brewis *et al.*, 2023).

Most existing research continues to approach AI as a set of tools or applications that enhance specific marketing activities, rather than as a force that fundamentally reconfigures the architecture of marketing strategy, decision-making processes, and organizational agency. In parallel, much of the literature has focused on consumer responses to AI, examining how individuals perceive, evaluate, and interact with

AI-enabled marketing actions. While this stream has generated valuable insights, it has also underexplored the role of AI in shaping the very foundations of marketing strategy. Although recent studies have begun to examine managerial perspectives on AI adoption and use, highlighting challenges related to acceptance, skills, and organizational readiness (Iyer & Bright, 2024), these contributions offer only limited insight into how AI transforms strategic decision-making processes and action.

As a result, current scholarship has not yet fully theorized how AI reshapes the locus of marketing strategy. In particular, limited attention has been devoted to how the increasing autonomy of AI systems transforms marketing strategy from a predominantly human-centered process into a hybrid configuration of human and artificial agency, in which decisions are both formulated and enacted through algorithmic systems embedded in organizational and market infrastructures.

This special issue aims to advance research that reconceptualizes marketing strategy in the age of AI as an emergent socio-technical system. We invite contributions that examine how firms design, coordinate, and govern strategic action when AI systems are no longer merely decision-support tools, but active participants in the production and execution of marketing strategy.

Possible Research Questions

To guide submissions, the special issue welcomes contributions that address, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- How does AI transform the formulation and enactment of marketing strategy?
- How do firms design and manage human-AI decision architectures?
- What capabilities are required to develop and govern agentic AI systems in marketing?
- How do different forms of AI (predictive, generative, conversational, agentic) interact within marketing systems?
- How does AI reshape decision authority, accountability, and control?
- How do AI systems influence value creation and competitive dynamics?
- What are the implications of AI for marketing agility and real-time strategy adaptation?
- What new metrics and performance indicators are needed to evaluate AI-driven marketing activities?
- How should firms design marketing strategies for machine customers?
- How can AI support sustainability-oriented marketing activities and strategies?
- How can inclusion and fairness be embedded into AI-enabled marketing systems?
- How can firms ensure transparency and explainability in AI-enabled marketing decisions?

Topics

In line with these questions, the special issue encourages contributions addressing the following topics:

- AI-enabled marketing strategy and execution
- Human-AI collaboration and decision architectures
- Agentic AI and autonomous marketing systems
- Integration of predictive, generative, and conversational AI in marketing
- Marketing capabilities in AI-driven organizations
- AI-driven innovation and new product development
- AI and the future of marketing work (skills, roles, and teams)
- Algorithmic intermediation and platform competition
- Customer experience in AI-mediated environments
- Machine customers and automated consumption
- Governance and control of AI in marketing and branding
- AI and sustainability-oriented marketing strategies

- Responsible and inclusive AI in marketing and branding
- Data, privacy, and trust in AI-driven marketing
- Explainable AI (XAI) in marketing decision-making

Conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions are all welcome.

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WEDEL M., KANNAN P.K. (2016), “Marketing analytics for data-rich environments”, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 80, n. 6, pp. 97-121.

Paper submission (deadline 13 december 2026)

To submit papers to the special issue please follow instructions described at the following link: <https://www.sijm.it/author-guidelines/>

You have to indicate the type of submission you are proposing, please in SECTION indicate “When AI Acts: Rethinking Marketing Strategy, Decision Authority, and Value Creation”

On the same page guidelines and template to layout papers are indicated.

Peer review process

The review process is described here: <https://www.sijm.it/peer-review-procedures/>

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Via Interrato dell'Acqua Morta 26, 37129 Verona - tel. 045 597655
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