

Artificial, Living, and Human Intelligence in Marketing Education

2026 Annual Fall Educators Conference Proceedings

Editors

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Marketing Management Association Fall 2026 Educators Conference Proceedings

***31st Annual Marketing Management Association Fall Educators Conference
September 23-25, 2026, New Orleans, Louisiana***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Marketing Management Association is proud to present the 31st MMA Fall Educators Conference! We were excited to bring together colleagues from around the world for a collegial and inspiring conference focused on marketing education. The papers, panel sessions, and special sessions submitted to this year's conference covered a wide range of cutting-edge topics that are critically important to the future of marketing education.

This year's conference brings together marketing educators, scholars, and practitioners to explore the evolving landscape of marketing education under the theme, ***Artificial, Living, and Human Intelligence in Marketing Education***. As artificial intelligence continues to transform how we teach, learn, conduct research, and practice marketing, this year's conference provides an important opportunity to consider not only the capabilities of emerging technologies, but also the distinctly human qualities that remain central to effective marketing education.

We are very thankful to all the scholars who submitted papers, volunteered for special sessions and panels, reviewed papers, and volunteered to be session chairs. The conference cannot run without these volunteers. Special thanks to **Beth Houran**, Publications Editor, for assembling all the material into these conference proceedings.

We are proud to have had the Doctoral Student Consortium, sponsored by **The Original Videobook for Principles of Marketing**, back for a fourth year in a row at the conference. Thank you to our consortium co-chairs, **Dalila Salazar Morningstar** and **Brian Rutherford**, for all their efforts in putting together an outstanding program. We are also grateful to the many excellent consortium faculty colleagues who presented during the consortium. To all the doctoral students who attended this year's consortium, we welcome you to the Marketing Management Association! We are sure you had an excellent experience and look forward to seeing you at future MMA conferences.

It was great to offer two pre-conference workshops, sponsored by **Hubro Simulations**. Thank you to **Susan Jones** and **Sheri Lambert** for leading the pre-conference workshop, ***Build Your Case at the JAME Case Writers Workshop***, and **Jeremy Kagan** for leading the pre-conference workshop, ***The Latest Marketing AI for the Classroom and Workplace***.

Three teaching competitions were held this year, with finalists selected before the conference. Thank you to **Interpretive Simulations** for sponsoring the Teaching Innovation competition, to **Adrienne Wallace** for leading the competition, and to the dedicated panel of judges. We also thank **Marketplace Simulations**, which sponsored this year's Master Teacher Award Competition. Thank you to **Jean Beaupre**, the Master Teacher Award competition coordinator, for leading that competition's judges who selected a great slate of finalists. Thank you to **Rebecca Dingus** for leading the Doctoral Student Teacher Scholar Competition, and to the dedicated panel of judges. To all our sponsors, your continued support is invaluable to the Marketing Management Association, and we look forward to a long relationship to come. All judges and finalists are listed later in these Proceedings and in the Conference Program.

The Best Refereed Paper Award, sponsored by **StratX Simulations**, went to **Scott Cowley**, Western Michigan University, for his paper entitled ***"The Marketing Experience Pyramid: A Conceptual Framework for Career Preparation."*** The winning paper was selected prior to the conference after two rounds of blind peer review.

Finally, special thanks go to our exhibitors **Hubro Simulations**, **Interpretive Simulations**, **Marketplace Simulations**, **Novela Simulations**, **StratX Simulations**, **The Original Videobook for Principles of Marketing**, **Cengage**, **Management by the Numbers**, **Pearson Learning**, and **Stukent Simulations**. You offered us great ideas, tools, and training to improve our effectiveness in the classroom, and we are proud to promote you in these proceedings, on the conference website, and in the Conference Program. Without you, we could not put on this conference, and we welcome you to join us again next year!

The 2027 MMA Fall Educators Conference will be held September 15-17, 2027, at the Drury Plaza Hotel in San Antonio, TX! The 2027 MMA Spring Conference will be held virtually March 18-19, 2027.

Many thanks to everyone involved with the conference! We hope you enjoyed lots of stimulating conversation, learned a few new ideas to take back to the classroom, and met some fellow scholars who share your passion for improving the lives of our students!!!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
2026 SPONSORS & EXHIBITORS	iv
Gold Sponsors	iv
Silver Sponsors	iv
Bronze Exhibitors.....	iv
CONFERENCE COMPETITIONS AND AWARDS	v
MARKETING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION.....	vii
2026-2027 OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS.....	vii
BOARD MEMBERS	vii
PUBLICATIONS OFFICERS.....	vii
CONFERENCE PROGRAM COMMITTEE	vii
CONFERENCE PAPER REVIEWERS	viii
CONFERENCE SESSION CHAIRS	x
CONFERENCE ATTENDEES.....	xi
REFEREED PAPERS	1
PANEL PAPERS	218
SPECIAL SESSION PAPERS.....	255
TEACHING COMPETITION PAPERS	269

AI ASSESSMENT ROLES: A LEGITIMACY FRAMEWORK FOR MARKETING EDUCATORS

Roberto Bello, University of Georgia

ABSTRACT

Generative AI is increasingly entering assessment in higher education, yet most discussions still frame the issue as one of technology acceptance: whether AI is useful, easy to use, trusted, or efficient. This paper argues that assessment requires a different theoretical lens. Because grading carries consequences for motivation, progression, scholarships, employability signals, and institutional fairness, AI-mediated assessment should be evaluated as a question of legitimacy rather than acceptance. Legitimacy refers to whether AI's role in assessment is perceived as appropriate, justified, accountable, and governed by acceptable educational norms. The paper develops a role-contingent framework that distinguishes five AI roles in assessment: assistant, evaluator, arbiter, monitor, and governor. These roles vary by AI authority, scope of impact, and legitimacy threshold. The framework offers marketing educators a practical basis for deciding when AI use is defensible, when stronger safeguards are required, and when efficiency alone is insufficient in consequential educational assessment contexts today.

INTRODUCTION

Generative artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming part of higher education assessment. Faculty are no longer using AI only to draft teaching materials or support student learning; AI is increasingly being considered for feedback, rubric alignment, scoring support, and assessment analytics. This shift creates a problem that conventional technology acceptance models do not fully address. In most acceptance frameworks, the central question is whether users perceive a system as useful, easy to use, trustworthy, or efficient (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). These constructs matter, but they are insufficient when AI enters assessment. Assessment is not simply another instructional workflow. It assigns value to student work and carries consequences for motivation, progression, scholarships, employability signals, and institutional credibility (Boud, 1995; Carless, 2006).

The core argument of this paper is that AI-mediated assessment should be understood through legitimacy rather than acceptance. Acceptance asks whether students or instructors are willing to use a system. Legitimacy asks whether the system should be granted authority in a given educational context. In Suchman's (1995) terms, legitimacy concerns whether an action or arrangement is perceived as appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, and expectations. This distinction matters because students may accept AI as a brainstorming partner, study aid, or formative feedback tool

while rejecting the same system as an evaluator of academic performance. In assessment, the issue is not merely whether AI works. The issue is whether AI's evaluative role is appropriate, justified, accountable, and governed by acceptable norms.

This issue is especially important in marketing education. Marketing courses frequently assess case analyses, marketing plans, strategy memos, presentations, ethical reasoning, and managerial recommendations. These tasks require interpretation, trade-off analysis, contextual reasoning, and persuasive argumentation rather than simple right-or-wrong answers. Assessment scholarship has long shown that students evaluate grading systems through judgments of fairness, clarity, credibility, and procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Struyven et al., 2005). Feedback research also shows that evaluative comments are filtered through affective and motivational reactions, especially when attached to grades (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Ryan & Henderson, 2018). AI may improve speed and consistency, but those benefits do not automatically make its assessment role educationally legitimate.

This paper develops a role-contingent framework for AI legitimacy in assessment. The framework begins from a simple premise: AI-mediated assessment is not one category. Legitimacy depends on what AI is authorized to do, whose outcomes are affected, and what safeguards govern its use. Three concepts organize the framework: AI authority, scope of impact, and legitimacy threshold.

AI authority refers to the extent to which AI influences assessment-related judgment. Low-authority uses support human activity without evaluating student performance, such as drafting formative comments or refining rubric language. Moderate-authority uses provide assessment-relevant judgments while leaving final decisions to humans, such as generating rubric-aligned comments or suggesting preliminary grade bands. High-authority uses meaningfully shape consequential outcomes, such as automated scoring, grade recommendations, rankings, or pass/fail judgments. The legitimacy problem intensifies as AI moves from support to judgment.

Scope of impact refers to the breadth of consequences associated with AI use. Some applications affect individual assignments, students, instructors, or courses. Others operate at the program or institutional level through assurance-of-learning dashboards, academic integrity systems, early-warning analytics, or grading consistency tools. Institutional uses raise broader concerns because they may classify students, influence instructor evaluation, or trigger interventions. Educational testing standards similarly emphasize that assessment practice must consider validity, fairness, accountability, technology use, and consequences, not merely measurement efficiency (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014).

Legitimacy threshold refers to the level of justification, transparency, accountability, and contestability required for AI involvement to be defensible. The threshold rises as AI authority increases and as the scope of impact broadens. Low-stakes support may require basic disclosure and responsible human use. AI-generated evaluative comments require clearer rubric alignment and instructor review. AI-shaped grades require fairness evidence, human accountability, and appeal mechanisms. Institutional governance tools require auditability, due process, privacy protections, and safeguards against surveillance creep (Miao & Holmes, 2023; National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023).

Using these dimensions, the framework identifies five roles. (1) AI as Assistant supports instructors or students without making assessment judgments. (2) AI as Evaluator provides assessment-relevant judgments but does not make final decisions. (3) AI as Arbiter meaningfully shapes, recommends, ranks, or determines grades. (4) AI as Monitor tracks, summarizes, flags, or visualizes assessment-related patterns across students, sections, courses, or programs. (5) AI as Governor structures institutional assessment systems or decision processes. These roles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of AI Roles in Assessment

AI role	Authority / scope	Core function	Assessment examples	Legitimacy threshold and safeguards
AI as Assistant	Low authority; individual/course scope	Supports instructor or student activity Without making assessment judgments	Drafting formative comments; suggesting rubric language; generating practice questions	Low threshold: basic transparency, responsible use, and human discretion
AI as Evaluator	Moderate authority; individual/course scope	Provides assessment-relevant judgments while humans retain final authority	Rubric-aligned feedback; diagnostic comments; preliminary scoring	Moderate threshold: instructor review, rubric alignment, and explanation of AI's role
AI as Arbiter	High authority; individual/course scope	Meaningfully shapes, recommends, ranks, or determines grades or evaluative outcomes	Automated scoring; final-grade recommendations; pass/fail judgments	High threshold: fairness evidence, validity, contestability, and human accountability
AI as Monitor	Low-to-moderate authority; program/institutional scope	Tracks, summarizes, flags, or visualizes assessment-related patterns for human interpretation	Learning-outcome dashboards; grading consistency alerts; early-warning indicators	Moderate-to-high threshold: data quality, privacy protections, aggregation rules, and Safeguards against surveillance creep

AI as Governor	High authority; program/institutional scope	Structures or constraints institutional assessment systems or decision processes	Academic integrity systems; assurance-of- learning governance; institutional risk flags	Very high threshold: auditability, due process, appeal mechanisms, institutional accountability, and proportionality
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The framework contributes to AI education research by shifting attention from adoption to delegated authority. The AI Assessment Scale usefully clarifies permissible levels of student AI use in assessed work and helps align AI use with learning outcomes (Furze et al., 2024; Perkins et al., 2024). Strategic offloading perspectives similarly explain how delegating cognitive work to AI may support or undermine learning depending on the task and conditions of use (Wang & Zhang, 2026). This paper addresses a different problem: what educators and institutions may legitimately delegate to AI when judging student performance. That is not a question of student learning support; it is a question of institutional authority.

Recent evidence on AI-assisted grading reinforces this distinction. Students' responses to AI grading are not reducible to usefulness and ease of use; trust, fairness, transparency, and oversight expectations shape whether they perceive AI-assisted grading as acceptable (Bello, 2026a; Jones-Jang et al., 2025; Noel et al, 2025; Zacharis & Papadakis, 2025). Evidence that students view high-score AI feedback as more fair and legitimate than low-score AI feedback, even when actionability remains stable, suggests that students may separate the usefulness of feedback from the legitimacy of AI-mediated judgment (Bello, 2026b). Put bluntly, students may accept the feedback while resisting the authority of the grade.

For marketing educators, the practical implication is direct: do not begin with "Can AI make grading faster?" Begin with "What role is AI playing?" Low-stakes formative uses may be defensible with disclosure and instructor discretion. Higher-stakes evaluative uses require stronger safeguards. AI-shaped grading requires transparency, human accountability, and meaningful appeal. Institutional monitoring and governance require explicit policy, auditability, and limits on secondary uses of data. Some AI uses may be useful and still illegitimate. In assessment, efficiency is not enough.

Future research should test how students perceive legitimacy across AI roles and whether formative AI feedback is viewed as more legitimate than summative AI grading. Research should also examine faculty disclosure practices, student appeal expectations, and disciplinary differences across marketing, management, accounting, finance, and analytics. These differences matter because marketing education includes both technical tasks and judgment-intensive assignments. The legitimacy threshold for AI should therefore vary with the nature of the assessment, the consequence of the decision, and the authority AI has been granted.

The central claim is straightforward: AI can assist assessment, but it should not quietly acquire assessment authority. In consequential educational settings, legitimacy

depends on role clarity, consequence sensitivity, human accountability, and contestability. Marketing educators must govern AI-mediated assessment not only as a tool of efficiency, but as a matter of educational justice.

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REALIZING SELF-EFFICACY THROUGH COMBINED FACTORS FOSTERING FACULTY GRATIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study aims to understand how marketing faculty build self-efficacy through the combined factors of vitality, collegiality, and resilience, enabling them to thrive in the ever-changing higher education environment. The goal is to understand strategies that contribute to and support vitality, collegiality, and resilience strategies for marketing faculty in higher education academic environments. Data analysis resulted in four themes: (a) positive mindset and engagement with students and colleagues, (b) support in the environment, (c) relationship building with other departments, and (d) professional development. The results serve as the basis for proposing additional professional development and support, as needed, to meet faculty needs for self-gratification through performance.

INTRODUCTION

To achieve teaching objectives, faculty have collective responsibilities that include conducting extensive research while meeting service obligations to the university, department, discipline, and the community. These collective obligations and the organization's climate can affect faculty enjoyment, an indicator of positive emotions and satisfaction (Bing & Cai, 2025). These positive emotions can arise from student engagement, behavior, and learning motivation (Burić & Wang, 2024).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Faculty Self-Efficacy

Bandura's social cognitive theory refers to a teacher's belief in their capability to successfully foster student engagement and facilitate learning, even with challenging or unmotivated students (Tschannen et al., 2001). Research has found that school-related and personal factors that impact faculty self-efficacy. (See Figure 1).



Figure 1

School Climate Factors and Faculty Gratification (Bing & Cai, 2025).

According to Bing and Cai (2025), work engagement, job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, well-being, joy, and pride can influence faculty self-efficacy, and are associated with positive school climate factors.

Faculty Vitality

Establishing and sustaining faculty vitality involves complex, engaging interactions between faculty and the work environment (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Vital faculty members are more likely to collaborate with peers, set meaningful goals, embrace growth opportunities, maintain a positive attitude, and demonstrate long-term commitment to self-improvement (DeFelippo & Dee, 2022). According to DeFelippo and Dee (2022), highly productive faculty experience more vitality.

Collegiality

A component of the higher education work environment are faculty relationships and collegiality. A collegial environment fosters a sense of community, increased energy, and encourages faculty to overcome challenges (DeFelippo & Dee, 2022). Higher levels of vitality can result when faculty belong to a community that values and appreciates them by providing social support (Lavrusheva, 2020).

Faculty Resilience

Faculty resilience is the ability to cope with difficult situations, involving mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility, to adjust to internal and external demands (Reiniatie et al., 2025). According to Garipağaoğlu (2025), mindfulness and job crafting can increase resilience. Job-crafting is a common practice of resilience, as faculty explore appropriate, innovative solutions to address new demands and challenges while proactively using available resources (Walk & Handy, 2018). Garipağaoğlu (2025) stated that the job-crafting approach requires trust and confidence in the organization, as it involves stepping outside

formal job duties, trying new approaches, or taking on additional responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examined higher education faculty to understand how they attain self-efficacy through the combined factors of vitality, collegiality, and resilience. The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method was used to analyze domains and starts with concrete themes. The ten participants are successful, experienced faculty working in higher education. The professionals' tenure in their respective fields ranges from 6 to 41 years, with an average of 16 years.

RESULTS

Positive Mindset through Engagement with Students and Colleagues

Participants described the need to effectively engage and evaluate students' performance, interact with colleagues, exhibit resilience when faced with challenges, and prosper through professional development programs. All 10 participants believed that engagement with students and colleagues fostered a positive mindset and vitality in their role as faculty. Participant #8 stated that motivation came from helping students succeed academically, professionally, and personally.

Supports in the Environment

All participants emphasized the importance of belonging, intellectual growth, and commitment to work in their responses. Participants consider mentoring a highly rewarding experience and an important way to contribute to faculty development and instructional quality. The majority of the participants believed that mentoring inspires faculty and an important mentor is their department chair. Participant #5 added that a good chair will take faculty under their wing and guide them toward their professional goals.

Relationship Building Among Academic Departments

All of the participants felt that instructional strategies and confidence grow stronger through collaboration with colleagues, participation in learning communities, and the sharing of best practices. Participant #8 stated that support from relationship-building among colleagues is important for maintaining adaptability, optimism, and commitment in the face of ongoing challenges. Six of the ten participants noted that it is challenging to set aside time for informal mentoring with colleagues because of office location and workload.

Professional Development

Participant #8 stated that there are several professional development opportunities available on campus and through professional associations. Participant #2 noted that job crafting can make the role as a faculty member easier. Participant #2 emphasized that working with the chair, colleagues, instructional designers, and practitioners is done to redesign or modify jobs so the course material is more satisfying and appealing. Participant #8 stated that resilience involves responding constructively to challenges, embracing new technologies, adjusting to evolving student needs through job crafting, and practicing

mindfulness. The participants noted that faculty set aside time for informal mentoring, updating knowledge of course content, and job crafting through professional development activities.

DISCUSSION

According to Sharma and Sood (2023), research evidence suggests a strong, significant relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction. The responses provided by the participants indicate that approaching the role of teaching is influenced by a positive mindset in the engagement with students and colleagues. Our findings support the research by Dixon and Saam (2024) where they reported that there is a need for faculty to feel they belong to the community, continue to grow intellectually, be committed to their work and to the campus. Faculty experience gratification as the result of student's positive engagement and an increase in performance-related outcomes (Toropova, Myrberg, and Johansson 2021).

Participants described the need for clarification of policies and priorities, as well as assistance from administrators. According to August and Waltman (2004), how well a chairperson supports, interacts, and helps socialize faculty members is another aspect of gratification. The participants mentioned that assistance from administrators like the chair can take the form of problem-solving, technology support, reduced workload, inspiration, and encouragement.

Relationship building among departments includes collaboration and problem-solving in a positive organizational climate, which is important for faculty self-efficacy and self-gratification. Building relationships between departments can be achieved through positive relationships with coworkers, open lines of communication, and participation in workplace activities with colleagues (Rothmann et al., 2008). The majority of participants agreed with research results by Defelippo and Dee (2022), where collegiality often begins through informal, unstructured conversations with colleagues, beyond typical committee meetings.

Professional development programs encourage the exchange of ideas, foster collegial relationships, and practices. Cruz and Herzog (2018) reported that strategies to sustain vitality and engagement with both students and colleagues are essential to maintaining a positive mindset. As a result, teaching effectiveness can reach desired goals, and overall satisfaction can be positively affected through a stronger sense of professional connection and support.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Faculty members have more control and flexibility over time and generally understand what the academic schedule requires from them. Therefore, effective time management, formal and informal mentoring, professional development activities, and relationship building influence the ability to adapt to meet the challenges of workload and home expectations. Recommendations derived from the analysis of the data and literature review are as follows:

1. Professional development programs that promote instructional excellence, student success, and time management strategies.
2. Innovative mentoring programs to facilitate a sense of belonging, community engagement, and relationships building between departments.
3. Administrative support and socializing of faculty to higher education climate.

This study is exploratory, and the findings imply a positive, proactive approach to achieving self-efficacy. In addition, effective communication, along with a positive mindset through engagement with students and colleagues, supportive environments, relationship building among academic departments, and professional development activities, is necessary. Faculty, students, and the institution will benefit from a learning environment that promotes a positive approach to school climate factors and fosters self-efficacy.

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A FRAMEWORK FOR PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK IN AN AI-DRIVEN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The A²C³E framework is presented as a model for preparing marketing and business students for the future of work in AI-enabled environments. As artificial intelligence revolutionizes knowledge work, educators must adapt to prepare business students for a new work environment. The A²C³E framework highlights the importance of cultivating cognitive competencies, including adaptability, agility, critical thinking, and creativity alongside social-emotional capabilities, such as collaboration and emotional insight. Business education provides an important context for fostering these attributes through intentional pedagogical design. Drawing from prior scholarship in marketing and management education, simulations, experiential learning, internships, case analysis, case symposiums, team-based projects, arts-based methods, and mindfulness-oriented practices are highlighted as mechanisms for developing these competencies in students. Thus, the A²C³E framework offers a structure for reimagining marketing and business pedagogy so that graduates are better prepared to successfully navigate an AI-driven world.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the way knowledge work is performed, and higher education must adapt accordingly to prepare business students for a new work environment. Prominent corporate leaders are acknowledging the changes that the advent of these new technologies will bring. For example, Walmart CEO Doug McMillon noted that AI is “going to change literally every job” in the world (Nassauer & Chip, 2025). Similarly, Chairman and CEO of JP Morgan Chase, Jamie Dimon, declared that “AI will affect virtually every function, application, and process in the company” (Dimon, 2026). Moreover, Ford CEO Jim Farley suggested that “literally half of all white-collar workers in the U.S.” could be affected by AI-driven restructuring (Ma, 2025).

Given this imminent conversion in the way human labor will be deployed in business settings, how might educators prepare marketing and business students? Can business pedagogy be reimagined so that students are not only knowledgeable about emerging technologies, but also equipped with the human capabilities needed to apply them responsibly and effectively? The present work argues that cultivating a blend of cognitive (thinking) skills, including adaptability, agility, critical thinking, and creativity will be especially consequential for students. These capabilities will need to be accompanied by

social-emotional (human) skills, such as collaboration and emotional insight. Together, these capabilities comprise the A²C³E framework, which delineates the critical competencies students will need to succeed in future work environments.

Conceptual Approach: The A²C³E Framework

Business education provides an important context for cultivating the competencies in the A²C³E framework. The business classroom can serve as a training ground for these future-ready attributes by designing learning experiences that encourage and promote adaptability, agility, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and emotional insight (Kemp & Paulin, 2026).

BACKGROUND: APPLYING THE A²C³E FRAMEWORK IN EDUCATION

Adaptability and Agility

Automation will likely restructure industries and redefine jobs (Nassauer & Chip, 2025). Those who can learn continuously and integrate emerging technologies will remain relevant. As a result, graduates who are adaptable and agile will be more adept at navigating change, acquiring new skills, and eventually leading through organizational transformations. Adaptability is the capacity to adjust to new conditions, environments, or expectations, whereas agility refers to the speed and flexibility with which one responds to change. As artificial intelligence accelerates change and development, students must develop the intellectual capacity to respond to evolving demands. This will require them to pivot quickly, experiment, and make decisions under ambiguous conditions.

Drawing from experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2009), which emphasizes learning through experience, reflection, and experimentation, educators can cultivate adaptability and agility through applied engagement. This might include incorporating simulations as well as experiential learning into the classroom experience. Simulations function as dynamic representations of a business scenario, necessitating that students adapt to changing contexts (Sheikh et al., 2023; Pricer et al., 2026). Beyond the classroom, internships may be especially critical in helping students develop intellectual flexibility (Hoyle & Goffnett, 2013; Hora et al., 2017). Requiring multiple internship experiences at key points throughout the college journey may be necessary. These approaches can help students manage uncertainty and apply knowledge in dynamic settings.

Critical Thinking

As business professionals evaluate complex data and make optimal, ethical decisions, strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills will be imperative. AI will perform many of the routine and repetitive tasks; thus, professionals will have to transition from being operational thinkers to strategic thinkers. Consequently, educators must focus on developing thinkers, rather than task completers.

Scholarship in business and management education has long argued that critical thinking should be taught (McEwen, 1994). Critical thinking requires that students not only master information, but also develop sufficient understanding to analyze and question it. This skill can be strengthened through case analysis and case symposiums that encourage

real-time, discussion-based learning and promote higher-order skill development. During these experiences, students generate and organize ideas, apply concepts, design systematic plans of action, and construct and evaluate arguments (McEwen, 1994; Mu & Hatch, 2024; Rosier, 2022). These approaches encourage students to move beyond passive absorption of content toward evaluation, analysis, and justification.

Creativity

Creativity fuels innovation. Ingenuity is the life-blood of successful organizations. While AI excels at automating tasks and synthesizing information with speed and efficiency, it lacks the essence or aura of human creativity (Benjamin, 1938/1968). In an AI-augmented world, human creativity may remain a competitive advantage. Professionals must be prepared to analyze, experiment, and lead with imagination, while human intentionality continues to supply the spirit that undergirds innovation.

Creativity can be fostered by inviting students to generate original solutions to case problems and client projects. Creativity is inherent in many marketing activities involving the promotion function; however, managerial work also involves imagination as well as analysis. Creativity is a key antecedent to innovation and entrepreneurial action (Shane & Nicolaou, 2015; Karami et al., 2025). Recent pedagogical practices use arts-based methods (ABMS), which include the use of visual arts, music, and drama in business education to promote reflection, dialogical learning, and emotional engagement (Ludviga & Sennikova, 2025; Lehtimäki et al., 2026). This approach might manifest as storyboarding, visual concept development, improvisational exercises, role-play, and reframing activities in marketing and business courses. Such exercises can help enhance creativity in problem-solving and support innovation.

Collaboration

In today's evolving workplace, employers seek workers who can operate effectively in cross-functional environments (NACE, 2024). As AI systems become integrated into organizational workflows, professionals will need to collaborate not only with other people, but also with AI tools that function as co-workers in hybrid work environments. As a result, effective collaboration with both humans and technology will be critical as professionals strategically harness AI to drive innovation.

Collaboration can be developed in business classrooms through team-based projects. Research on team-based learning and teamwork competencies suggests that structured group learning can strengthen engagement, accountability, and performance (Michaelsen & Sweet, 2008). Teamwork competencies include knowledge, skills, and abilities that help to further develop effective communication, conflict management, and collaborative problem-solving (Stevens & Campion, 1994; Berger et al., 2026). In these team-based environments, students can also incorporate AI technologies into their workflows. This will begin conditioning them for the collaborative settings they will likely encounter in professional environments.

Emotional Insight

Human emotional competencies will be paramount in AI-enabled environments. Technology can analyze and automate, but it cannot care. Emotionally self-aware professionals who stay grounded amid change and respond with empathy will build trust in the workplace. Ethical and emotionally intelligent leadership will be essential to ensuring that human values guide technological advancement.

Emotional insight can be cultivated in students by promoting mental wellness, mental health literacy, and self-awareness within the educational environment. This is consistent with research showing that emotional competencies and emotional intelligence are associated with stronger academic performance (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020; Quílez-Robres et al., 2023; Kemp et al., 2025). Mindfulness-based approaches have also been shown to not only reduce stress but to enhance decision making and foster empathy, compassion, and resilience (Shebaya, 2025).

CONCLUSION

In sum, the A²C³E framework offers a useful structure for reimagining business pedagogy in order to prepare a workforce capable of thriving amid rapid disruption and technological change. By intentionally fostering adaptability, agility, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and emotional insight, marketing programs and business schools can help prepare graduates to lead with both competence and humanity in an AI-driven world.

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EXAMINING AI-ENABLED MENTAL HEALTH CHATBOT USE INTENTIONS AND PERCEIVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z is becoming one of the largest consumer groups for artificial intelligence (AI) mental health technologies. This research examines Gen Z college students' intentions to use AI-enabled mental health chatbots, along with associated psychological outcomes, and perceived academic performance. Drawing from Service Convenience Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, a conceptual model was developed and tested using data from 212 Gen Z college students across multiple universities. Results indicate that AI chatbot accessibility is positively related to intentions to use mental health chatbots. Use intentions were also positively related to academic self-efficacy and emotion regulation. In turn, academic self-efficacy was positively related to perceived academic performance. Finally, results show that academic self-efficacy enhanced perceived academic performance for continuing-generation students, but not for first generation students. While AI-enabled mental health chatbots may offer accessible and scalable support, concerns regarding privacy, safety, and relational dependency remain important.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is becoming one of the largest consumers of artificial intelligence (AI) mental health chatbots (Kwon et al, 2026). A mental health chatbot is an artificial intelligence-enabled conversational system that engages users in text- or voice-based dialogue to deliver mental health-related support. These technologies include clinically oriented AI-enabled mental health tools developed using evidence-based therapeutic frameworks (e.g., Wysa) as well as general-purpose large language models LLM (e.g., ChatGPT) that users turn to for mental health-related support (Kuhail et al, 2025; Data Intelligence, 2025). Recent data suggests that 43.75% of Gen Z prefer to discuss mental health issues first with AI chatbots rather than with family, friends, or a doctor (Resume.org, 2025). Some users describe AI chatbots as a therapist, coach, friend, or coworker, and 34% report confiding in AI chatbots about things they have never told another person (Resume.org, 2025).

In the United States, demand for mental health care is growing; nearly one in five adults' lives with a mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health, 2025). Despite the prevalence of mental health needs, the U.S. healthcare system is unable to fully accommodate demand due to a shortage of licensed mental health clinicians (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2024). Additionally, the cost of care can be financially unattainable for some individuals (Gao & Olfson, 2025). This growing problem creates significant opportunities for the use of AI-enabled mental health technologies, such as chatbots, which offer accessible modes of service delivery.

The purpose of this research is to examine Gen Z college students' use intentions toward AI-enabled mental health chatbots, associated psychological outcomes, and perceived academic performance. Drawing from Service Convenience Theory (Berry et al., 2002) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), this research explains why students may be drawn to chatbot-based mental health.

BACKGROUND

Service Convenience Theory provides the groundwork for understanding students' intentions to use AI-enabled mental health chatbots. These tools offer access convenience through 24/7 availability, as well as transaction convenience by allowing students to initiate support quickly and with minimal effort. Service Convenience Theory suggests that ease of access, reduced time costs, and immediate availability enhance perceived value (Berry et al., 2002). For Gen Z students, who may face structural and psychological barriers such as mental health-related stigma, the accessibility and anonymity of chatbots may lower the threshold for initial engagement (Inkster et al., 2018).

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997) extends this logic by explaining how chatbot use intentions may relate to students' perceived academic performance by way of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to manage situations (Bandura, 1997). In the context of mental health chatbot use, students who intend to use AI mental health chatbots may view these tools as supportive resources that help them regulate emotions and respond more effectively to academic challenges. As a result, use intentions may be positively associated with academic self-efficacy and emotion regulation. In turn, academic self-efficacy and emotion regulation is expected to be positively related to perceived academic performance, as students who are able to regulate their emotions and feel more capable of managing academic demands may also perceive themselves as performing more effectively.

Finally, this research considers whether student generational education status, specifically first-generation versus continuing generation, influences academic self-efficacy and perceived academic performance. Recent studies suggest that continuing-generation students may be more aware of emerging digital technologies than first-generation students (WGULabs, 2023) and digital inequality may disproportionately affect lower-income, first-generation college students (Katz et al., 2025; Michikyan et al., 2025). Although first-generation college students may be highly motivated to use accessible digital resources, they may face greater barriers related to digital access and awareness. Thus, continuing-generation students may perceive that they benefit from the use of these technologies to enhance academic performance.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: AI chatbot accessibility is positively related to use intentions.

H2: Public stigma toward mental health is positively related to use intentions.

H3: AI chatbot use intentions is positively related to academic self-efficacy.

H4: AI chatbot use intentions is positively related to emotion regulation.

H5: Academic self-efficacy is positively related to perceived academic performance.

H6: Emotion regulation is positively related to perceived academic performance.

H7: Education generational status moderates the relationship between academic self-efficacy and perceived academic performance, such that the effect of academic self-efficacy on perceived academic performance is greater for continuing-generation students than for first-generation students.

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from a convenience sample of 212 Gen Z college students. Students from two major institutions in the Midwestern and Southern parts of the United States were invited to participate in the study. To increase nationwide representation, participants were also recruited across the United States using Prolific data collection platform. Of the participants, 45% were male, 54% were female and about one percent classified themselves as non-binary.

All the measures used were drawn from well-established scales in the marketing literature and demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .857 - .952$). Data analyses were carried out using structural equation modeling. The measurement framework and structural model analysis was performed using AMOS graphics version 31. The measurement model fits the data well (CMIN = 904.937, $df = 540$, $p < .000$, CMIN/ $df = 1.67$; CFI = .937; RMSEA = .057). Factor loadings were significantly aligned with their respective latent constructs. Factor loadings ranged from .555 to .950 for all 35 items. The structural model also displayed adequate model fit (CMIN = 1110.477, $df = 549$, $p < .000$, CMIN/ $df = 2.023$; CFI = .907; RMSEA = .070). See Figure 1 for the structural model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

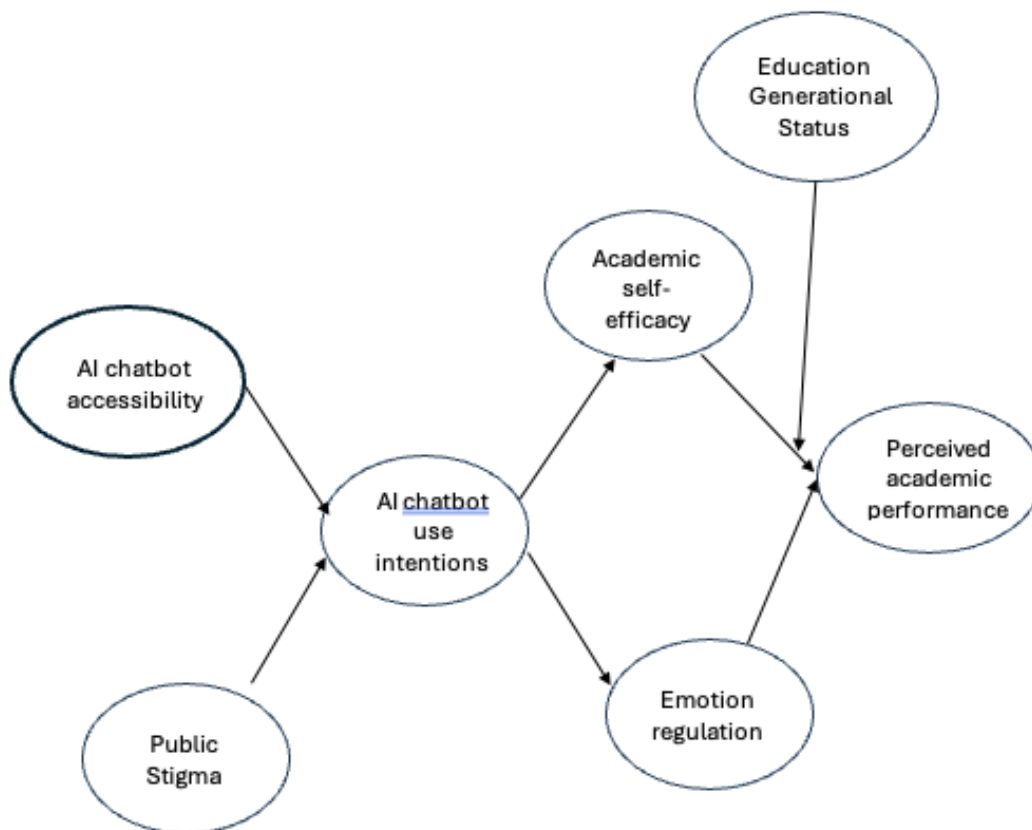
The data demonstrated that accessibility is positively related to Gen Z students' intentions to use AI-enabled mental health chatbots ($b = .550$, $p < .001$). In contrast, public stigma toward mental health was not significantly related to use intentions ($b = .101$, $p > .05$), which may reflect the possibility that Gen Z students are less encumbered by mental health stigma. AI chatbot use intentions were positively related to academic self-efficacy ($b = .350$, $p < .001$) and emotion regulation ($b = .535$, $p < .001$), indicating that students may view these tools as supportive resources for managing stress, processing emotions, and responding to academic challenges. Academic self-efficacy was also positively related to perceived academic performance ($b = .192$, $p < .01$), supporting the idea that students who feel more capable of managing academic demands are more likely to perceive themselves as performing well. However, emotion regulation was not positively related to academic performance ($b = -.06$, $p > .05$). Specifically, for continuing-generation students, academic self-efficacy enhanced perceived academic performance ($b = .371$, $p < .001$). However, this

relationship did not emerge for first-generation students ($b = .104, p > .05$). Thus, academic confidence may not translate into stronger perceptions of academic performance for first-generation students.

However, important concerns remain regarding the use of mental health chatbots. Issues related to data misuse, algorithmic bias, and limited human oversight should be carefully considered, and policies and regulations should be developed to address these risks (Talebi et al., 2025). In addition, the conversational tone and perceived warmth of mental health chatbots may foster emotional attachment and encourage repeated interaction (Xie et al., 2023; Monteith et al., 2025). These qualities raise ethical concerns about overreliance and the development of “pseudo-relationships. Therefore, while AI-enabled mental health chatbots may offer accessible and scalable support, their use should be considered alongside important questions of privacy, safety, dependency, and appropriate human oversight.

Figure 1

Model Explaining Academic Performance from AI Chatbot Use Intentions



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READY FOR THE WORLD? STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT READINESS FOR AN AI-ENABLED WORKFORCE

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ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes embedded in professional environments, business schools face pressure to prepare students for an evolving workforce. Drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory, this qualitative research examines marketing and business students' perceptions of AI, their feelings about its impact on employability, and the extent to which they believe their educational experiences are preparing them for an AI-driven workforce. Data were collected from 39 students enrolled in marketing courses at two universities in the southern United States. Findings reveal that students' feelings toward AI are mixed, with interest and engagement most common, but caution and skepticism are also prominent. Three primary themes emerged. First, students perceived preparation for AI-enabled work as incomplete and inconsistent. Second, many are reassessing their future careers in light of AI-driven change. Third, students believe business education should embrace AI through intentional, balanced curricular integration. Findings underscore the role of business education in preparing students for an AI-driven future.

INTRODUCTION

Firms are increasingly adopting generative AI technologies to streamline workflows, promote efficiency, and enhance productivity (Deloitte, 2023). Marketing has been among the early adopters of generative AI technologies. AI is reducing time investments by expeditiously providing drafts of marketing copy, social media posts, and mass email campaigns (AMA, 2026). This rapid integration of AI technologies is affecting entry-level, less-experienced workers disproportionately (InstitutionLabs, 2025). Since 2022, knowledge workers aged 22–25 have experienced a 16% relative decline in employment (Stanford Digital Economy Lab, 2025). The integration of AI into white-collar work environments has also created a significant gap between the skills taught in university degree programs and the competencies now required in the workplace (Avery, 2026; Pearson, 2026). A Lumina Foundation-Gallup Poll found that 42% of bachelor's students have reconsidered their field of study because of AI (Marken, 2026). Some academic institutions are responding by integrating AI literacy into career preparation (Avery, 2025; Pearson, 2026).

Drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), this research employs qualitative inquiry to examine marketing and business students' perceptions of artificial

intelligence, their feelings about its impact on their future employability, and the extent to which they believe their educational experiences are preparing them for an AI-driven workforce. This research also explores students' views regarding how business schools should respond to the growing role of AI in professional life.

BACKGROUND

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains how individuals' self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and contextual barriers influence their thinking about career opportunities, employability, and readiness for work (Lent et al., 1994). Thus, in the context of AI in the workforce, SCCT provides the theoretical foundation for explaining how AI is altering the way students think about career opportunities, required skills, and their employability.

METHODOLOGY

To address our research aims, students in marketing classes from two universities in the southern United States were asked open-ended questions through a Qualtrics survey about their perceptions of AI and how they believe it may affect them in the workforce. This approach facilitated the collection of varied student thoughts about how AI is affecting their future.

A total of 39 students completed an open-ended survey, which explored their perceptions of AI, their feelings about its impact on future employability, the extent to which they believe their educational experiences are preparing them for an AI-driven workforce, and their views on the growing role of AI in professional life. Of these participants, 25 were female, 10 were male, 1 was non-binary, and 2 preferred not to report their sex. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 32. Fifty-nine percent of the students were graduate students, and 41% were undergraduates. Students received extra credit for completing the survey, and participants were assigned aliases.

Students' feelings toward AI were assessed by asking them to select the emotional responses that best described how they felt about the technology. The most frequently provided responses were interest/engagement (63%), caution (34%), and skepticism (34%), followed by excitement and optimism (29%).

Student responses were then analyzed using an open-coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analysis followed an iterative approach, and decisions regarding emergent themes were made through consensus among the researchers. Three primary themes emerged. Overall, students felt that preparation for entering an AI-mediated workforce was incomplete and, in some instances, inadequate. They also found themselves reassessing their careers and felt that business education should embrace AI.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Theme 1: Preparation is Incomplete and Inconsistent

Participants perceived their preparation to work with AI as incomplete and inconsistent across course curricula. While some participants acknowledged that their coursework has helped them build important foundational capabilities, such as communication, analysis, and problem-solving, many indicated that AI has not been sufficiently directly integrated into the curriculum. Some students described feeling only partially prepared for the workforce and noted that much of their AI learning has been self-directed rather than formally taught. At the same time, the comments reveal a clear tension between recognizing AI's relevance and wanting to preserve independent thinking. Several respondents expressed concern about becoming overly dependent on AI. Thus, responses indicate that students desire a more intentional, balanced, and responsible educational approach to AI.

My coursework helps build strong foundational skills like communication, analysis, and problem-solving, which are important when using AI. However, I think there could be more direct integration of AI tools into the curriculum to prepare students better. –Sheila (graduate)

I do not feel that my educational experiences are strongly preparing me to work with AI technologies. Most of my learning has focused on understanding concepts and completing work independently rather than integrating AI into the process. –Taylor (graduate)

I feel like school actively discourages the use of AI, but I understand why and think that students should do their own work. –John (undergraduate)

Theme 2: Reassessment of Future Careers

Students are reconsidering how to navigate their future careers in light of AI-driven change. Some participants view AI as a tool that can enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and professional growth; however, others expressed concern about job displacement and declining labor market opportunities. Across the comments, students frequently emphasized the need to remain adaptable, continue learning, and cultivate capabilities such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving that will enhance their overall value in the workforce. Several responses also reflected that AI is affecting students' broader sense of professional identity and career security.

AI has influenced how I think about certain career choices and how much AI technology usage would be involved in the role. –Amy (graduate)

AI makes me feel like I need to stay updated and learn how to use it to stay competitive. It may open up more opportunities, but at the same time, it makes me realize I need skills that AI cannot replace, like creativity and critical thinking. –Sarah (undergraduate)

I believe that AI will eliminate many jobs and further ruin the job market. I have very little hope in finding a job that pays well and aligns with my focus of study. –Silvia (graduate)

Theme 3: Embrace AI in Education

Participants expressed strong beliefs that business schools should fully embrace AI by integrating it throughout the curriculum. They stressed that older teaching models are no longer sufficient in an AI-driven environment. Participants also highlighted the importance of responsible and ethical AI education, suggesting that instruction should address both the benefits and limitations of AI while discouraging overreliance.

Business schools should integrate AI into their curriculum by teaching students how to use these tools responsibly and effectively. –Valerie, graduate

Schools should realize that AI is going to become even more dominant in the academic field. Old methods of teaching are not compatible with AI technology, and it must be integrated in every class. – Tom, graduate

I think business schools should teach students how to interact with AI but also be aware of the dangers of how it can limit our learning. Understanding the good and bad of AI is key. – Tony, undergraduate

This research explored college students' feelings and perceptions regarding the role of AI in the workforce. Students expressed concern about the adequacy of their preparation for a rapidly evolving AI-mediated professional environment. These findings underscore the important role of marketing and business education in preparing students to navigate the challenges and opportunities of an AI-driven future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings suggest three practical recommendations for business schools seeking to better prepare students for an AI-enabled workforce. First, AI should be intentionally integrated throughout the curriculum rather than addressed in isolated courses, allowing students to develop familiarity with AI tools across multiple business disciplines. Second, faculty should emphasize responsible and ethical AI use by teaching students when AI can enhance learning and decision-making while also reinforcing the importance of independent thinking, creativity, and critical analysis. Third, experiential learning opportunities, including AI-assisted projects, case analyses, and industry collaborations, may help students build confidence using AI in realistic business contexts.

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HOW STUDENTS USE AND FEEL ABOUT AI IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in professional marketing practices, marketing educators face the challenge of preparing students to use AI ethically, strategically, and with sound judgment. AI use in education has shown to have positive effects on learners, though the extent and facets are still being explored. Understanding student opinions, behaviors, and skills could lead to improved classroom engagement and learning. This pilot study empirically investigates if students' opinions about AI change throughout the course of a semester when AI is actively used. It examines how structured, guided use of AI within a course influences students' perceptions, confidence, and ethical understanding of AI in both academic and professional contexts. It aims to improve student learning through the use of AI in the classroom and ultimately make the students more marketable in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding student attitudes and behaviors toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) could lead to improved classroom engagement and learning. This enhanced understanding could improve how educators and those in the workplace embrace and utilize AI in the future. “The tremendously intensifying development, use, and (societal) impact of AI in recent years has sparked calls for and discussions of accompanying ethical guidelines: the ethical debate has gone mainstream,” (Hermann, 2022).

BACKGROUND

AI use in education has shown to have positive effects on learners, though the extent is still being discovered and increased. “Overall, the development trend of AIED has been developing to empower learner agency and personalization, enable learners to reflect on learning and inform AI systems to adapt accordingly, and lead to an iterative development of the learner-centered, data-driven, personalized learning,” (Ouyang, F. & Jiao, P., 2021).

AI has also been seen as a destructive force impacting higher education institutions (Almaraz-López, Almaraz-Menéndez, & López-Esteban). “[These] institutions must adapt to the changes in their administrative and educational processes that this technology can

bring and include training in AI in their curricula beyond computer science-focused degrees so that students in their future professional careers will be able to respond to the demands of the labor market,” (Almaraz-López, et al.) While AI has shown potential to enhance learning (Ouyang, F. & Jiao, P. 2021), less is known about how AI usage in the classroom influences students’ perceptions of its role in marketing. Incorporating technologies into marketing curricula may better prepare students for careers in an increasingly technology-integrated world but may also hinder learning outcomes (Slepchuck & John, 2025). This study examines changes in student attitudes following AI-supported assignments and reflections. It empirically investigates if students’ opinions about AI use in class change throughout the course of a semester when AI is used and encourages students to reflect about when and where AI use is appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

This pilot study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the research instrument and explore preliminary changes in student perceptions regarding AI use in marketing. Two undergraduate marketing courses participated in the study. Students completed anonymous pre- and post-test surveys. Because responses could not be matched at the individual level, analyses examined differences between pre-test and post-test groups. Using a pre-test/post-test research design, students completed a survey measuring familiarity with AI tools, comfort with AI-supported work, perceptions of ethical AI use, concerns about job displacement, and beliefs about originality and disclosure in marketing deliverables. Between survey administrations, students completed projects in which AI use is permitted during the development stages. Students were required to document how AI was used, evaluate its usefulness, and reflect on its limitations throughout the project. In one class students utilized AI in one assignment; in the other, AI was utilized in five assignments.

Pre- and post-project survey results were compared to identify changes in student attitudes and beliefs. Preliminary observations suggest that guided AI use, combined with structured reflection, may shift student perceptions of AI from a perceived threat or shortcut toward a supportive tool that complements human creativity and strategic thinking. As such, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis: Greater exposure to AI-supported assignments will be associated with changes in students’ perceptions regarding the appropriate use of AI in professional marketing work.

RESULTS

For the pilot test, a total of 58 students were surveyed. A Cronbach’s Alpha test was completed to determine the reliability of the scale. The test was completed using SPSS version 28. The data showed the mode (.68) to be acceptable ($> .60$). While this result is lower than anticipated the scale will be revised to increase the reliability of the scale for future research.

Students' perceptions of AI did change over the course of the semester. In the class with five AI assignments, significant findings were evident for (See Table 1.):

- *AI could harm the quality of marketing work through over-reliance.* There was an increase in agreement with this statement from pre-test to post-test.
- *Brand Storytelling is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.* There was a decrease in agreement with this statement from pre-test to post-test.
- *AI will create some job opportunities but also eliminate some roles.* There was a decrease in agreement with this statement from pre-test to post-test.
- *I'm unsure about how AI will impact my job opportunities in marketing.* There was an increase in agreement with this statement from pre-test to post-test.

Table 1

Independent-Samples t-Test Results for Survey Questions for Branding and Content Marketing Class

Survey Question	t (df)	p
AI is most useful in marketing for writing drafts	-1.398	0.08
AI could harm the quality of marketing work through over-reliance.	-1.85	0.03 **
Critical Thinking is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.	-1.34	0.09
Brand Storytelling is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.	2.44	0.008 **
AI will mostly create new job opportunities.	-1.435	0.08
AI will create some job opportunities but also eliminate some roles.	1.899	0.03 **
I'm unsure about how AI will impact my future job opportunities in marketing.	-2.38	0.011 **

** $p < .05$

When class results for the class with one assignment and the one with five assignments were combined and compared pre-test and post-test, the results were slightly different (See Table 2):

- *Brand Storytelling is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.* There was a decrease in agreement with this statement from pre-test to post-test. This was also deemed significant in the smaller sample. The Brand Storytelling percentage drop is more significant when the class with more AI assignments was separated than when combined. This could be due to the focus on Brand Storytelling in that particular class, which makes students more aware of the concept.
- *AI will mostly create new job opportunities.* There was an increase in agreement with this statement from pre-test to post-test. This only became significant when combining the two classes.

The impact on strategic thinking was almost significant in this sample. As such, this may prove significance in a larger sample so should be considered in future studies.

Table 2

Independent-Samples t-Test Results for Survey Questions for Branding and Content Marketing and Market Research Class

Survey Question	t (df)	p
AI is most useful in marketing for writing drafts	-0.70	0.24
AI could harm the quality of marketing work through over-reliance.	-1.53	0.06
Critical Thinking is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.	-0.697	.24
Strategic Thinking is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.	-1.62	0.053
Brand Storytelling is a skill that will matter most when AI is used in creating marketing deliverables.	2.16	0.016 **
AI will mostly create new job opportunities.	-2.05	0.02**

**p<.05

CONCLUSION

These findings suggest that simply allowing students to use AI is insufficient. Purposeful integration that requires documentation, reflection, and evaluation can prepare students for responsible and effective AI use in marketing.

This pilot study contributes to marketing education research by offering an instructional framework that integrates AI in a way that emphasizes ethical reasoning, originality, and strategic thinking, preparing students for AI-augmented marketing environments. Collectively, a key finding suggests that greater exposure to AI-supported assignments increased awareness of AI's benefits and limitations, particularly concerning over-reliance and career impacts. It could help as a guide to structure future course content and assignments in a way that uses AI appropriately and ethically. A better understanding of what students need from technology would help to identify ways for AI to be a tool without AI being a substitute for learning material or developing critical thinking skills.

AI does have an impact on student perceptions and behaviors. And while it may seem to be used as a “shortcut” for some at this time, it is likely going to evolve into a necessary tool in the future. Students want to embrace technology; however, how students use AI is still rapidly changing. As such, there is an opportunity to guide students' use of AI in productive, meaningful, educational ways that could benefit them in the workplace.

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CAREER READINESS DIGITAL MARKETING EDUCATION: FOSTERING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The marketing discipline has advanced significantly, shifting the focus toward efficiency and effectiveness. Hiring firms seek applicants with a marketing degree who possess the requisite skills. Although the practical application approach in marketing pedagogy is gaining ground, a gap persists in the proportion of marketing graduates securing gainful employment in the field. As a result, marketing educators need to advance their classroom approaches by focusing on career preparation and artificial intelligence. This paper contributes to the marketing education literature by presenting a model to address expectations within the digital marketing profession. The model highlights the communication knowledge domain. This domain is supported by several skills for students to develop and by tools for marketing educators to use. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research.

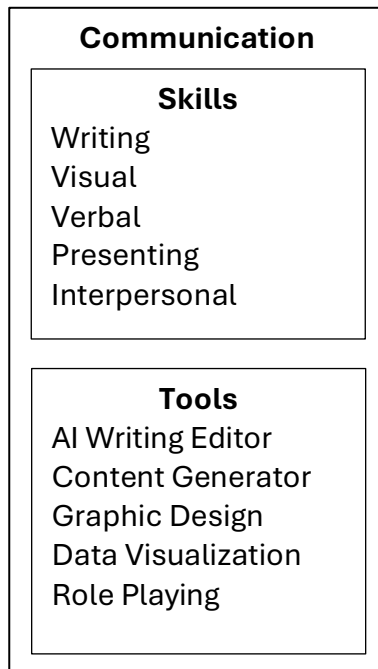
INTRODUCTION

Marketing graduates must understand foundational marketing principles to analyze marketing problems and provide meaningful solutions. All digital marketing educators now face the exciting or daunting task, depending on one's perspective, of using AI in their teaching and learning practices (Acar, 2024). Several practical applications have been identified, including curriculum development (Barger et al., 2024), marketing analytics (Allil, 2024), large language models (Ding et al., 2024), and prompt engineering (Sihi & Ryan, 2024). However, regardless of the teaching modality, the gap remains in preparing students to be market-ready upon graduation (Crittenden et al., 2019).

To address the situation, this paper contributes to the digital marketing education literature by outlining an essential knowledge domain: communication (AMA, 2025; Bacon et al., 2023; Elhajjar, 2022; Gravett & Winstone, 2022) as shown in the model in Figure 1. The paper provides a theoretical background, an overview of the communication knowledge domains, and an outline of the skills required to help students contribute to the digital marketing profession from the outset. It then informs marketing educators by noting digital tools, software platforms, and simulations that provide industry utility for students after graduation. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

Market-Relevant Communication Skills and Tools



BACKGROUND: COMMUNICATION THEORY

Shannon and Weaver's (Chandler & Munday, 2020) model of communication involves the information source, transmitter, receiver, and destination, with the message, signal, and noise along the way. The transactional model highlights how communicators are both creators and consumers of messages (Bax & Woodhouse, 2013). Interpersonal communication and relationships are central to enhancing organizational life and to developing as a whole person (Morreale et al., 2017). The idea is that an individual with advanced communication skills is more effective with superiors and colleagues in the workplace and has greater satisfaction with friends and family in their personal life. Students who are well-trained in communication skills are more successful in life (Alshare et al., 2011). Students who struggle with communication, due to a lack of confidence, high anxiety, or communication apprehension, do not fare as well (Okoro & Cardon, 2024).

AI is changing how communication occurs, both through technology and among humans. Integrated technology may heighten the awareness individuals feel when tasked with communicating in one of the various forms of AI (Kirk & Givi, 2025). Social presence, transparency, and trust will play important roles in how AI is used in marketing applications in the future (Wang et al., 2025). Therefore, marketing educators will need to develop methods to prepare students with human communication skills and AI communication tools to communicate effectively with both technology and humans. The following section explores domain-level communication knowledge before moving on to specific communication skills to develop and communication tools to use.

Communication Knowledge Domain

The communication domain encompasses a variety of skills once considered soft that are now recognized as cognitive and interpersonal characteristics of a successful marketing professional (Hora et al., 2018). Effective communication is often challenging to identify and assess beyond demonstrating competence in writing, presenting, and interacting with others in professional settings. However, mastery in this area is highlighted as a top priority in job postings (Elhajjar, 2022) and as one of the most essential skills for marketing professionals (AMA, 2025). The communication domain is often taken for granted, but it requires deliberate training to achieve excellence.

Educators must incorporate the communication domain into marketing pedagogy, but they lack a standardized benchmark for comparison or enough time to make informed assessments. For example, many experiences must be undertaken individually, which larger sections and fewer resources do not accommodate (Broadbent, 2018). Skills in this domain include writing, visual, verbal, presenting, and interpersonal. Tools in this domain are more focused on human characteristics and may be harder to quantify (Sautter & Zúñiga, 2018). However, they are designed to enhance human skills in the communication domain and include AI writing editors, content generators, graphic design tools, data visualization tools, and role-playing tools.

Communication Skills

Marketing graduates are expected to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to engage effectively with colleagues and clients. Successful interaction with others requires strong cognitive and technical writing skills to convey clear and persuasive messages (Klucevsek, 2016). Visual skills involve graphically representing quantitative values to communicate complex topics clearly and intuitively (Hair et al., 2024). In addition to the design component of communication, students must possess verbal skills to interact effectively with spoken language (De Grez et al., 2012). Whether in person or online, presenting skills require effectively organizing and transmitting information through verbal and visual communication (Ritchie, 2016). Whether in group or one-on-one situations, interpersonal skills manifest as self- and other-awareness, enabling effective work with diverse people (Loughry et al., 2013).

Communication Tools

Marketing professionals highly value writing skills (AMA, 2025). AI writing editors are software applications that can significantly enhance clarity and help authors write more concisely. Early adopters are familiar with Grammarly, founded in 2009; however, hundreds of free and subscription-based tools, such as WritingProAid, now compete in the market (Wadhwani & Ambekar, 2024). Content generators, such as ChatGPT, use machine learning and natural language processing to generate personalized written content from user prompts. Content quality is dependent on prompt parameters and refinement (Geroimenko, 2025). Involving AI in editing and content creation enhances efficiency and productivity by automating repetitive tasks and streamlining the proofreading process.

Graphic design involves using software to generate and manipulate visual content. Image generators include Google's Imagen, Midjourney, and Adobe Firefly. Data visualization

represents information through charts and graphs, making numerical data easier to understand (Hair et al., 2024). Role-playing involves a student assuming a sales position and a professor or external facilitator assuming the buyer's position (Dugan & Lee, 2023). The idea is to help students guide a prospective buyer through the sales process in a controlled setting and provide feedback to improve future performance.

Many communication tools use AI in their execution. Marketing educators have developed activities based on these tools and have provided evidence of improvement using various measures. See Table 1.

Table 1

Communication Tools in Digital Marketing Education

Tools	Activities	Measures
AI Writing Editor	ChatGPT	Process reflection (Kim et al., 2025)
	Grammarly	Process reflection (Phua et al., 2025)
	Quillbot	Assignment score (Dong, 2023)
		Tool use (Lestari & Fitria, 2025)
Content Generator	ChatGPT	Motivation (Li, 2023)
		Perceptions (Hazari, 2025)
		Usability scale (Kayali et al., 2023)
		Uses (Slepchuk & John, 2025)
	Voice Thread	Satisfaction (Wajda et al., 2022)
Graphic Design	xiQ	Satisfaction (Barger et al., 2024)
	Design Thinking	Process reflection (Grant, 2025)
	Canva	Process reflection (Hinchcliff & Mehmet, 2023)
Data Visualization	Tableau	Process reflection (Meyer & Bishop, 2022)
		Process reflection (DePaolo & Jacobs, 2021)
		Process reflection (Jacobs et al., 2024)
Role Playing	Cross-Cultural	International attitude (Herlache et al., 2018)
		Process reflection (Rodriguez & Boyer, 2018)
	Elevator Pitch	Performance (Schneider & Poddar, 2024)
	In-class Competition	Career intent (Johnson et al., 2022)
	Intercollegiate	Process reflection (Pelletier & Hopkins, 2018)
	Purposeful Choreography	Process reflection (Dugan & Lee, 2023)
	Sell Me This Pen	Self-assessment (Milovic et al., 2024)
	Surreal Play Experience	Self-assessment (Saavedra Torres & Rawal, 2021)

COMMUNICATION IN THE FUTURE

The theory-practice gap is not new to marketing education (Bacon, 2017). A marketing college degree is no longer sufficient to guarantee employment in the marketing profession (Wierenga et al., 2024). Moreover, marketing professionals will increasingly use AI in various capacities. Almost all marketing organizations already integrate AI in their marketing activities (Salesforce, 2025). Marketing educators will need to keep up by using AI in their instruction and having students use it in their classroom activities. However, marketing educators must be mindful of how students use AI to develop and curate content with appropriate attribution (Guha et al., 2024). Future studies could examine AI accuracy in communication, as well as how AI utilization policy influences marketing pedagogy.

Other streams of research can focus on communication skills for marketing students and on the tools marketing educators use to promote the attainment of these skills. Future studies should address curriculum development, marketing educator training, assessment, and domain integration. The model presented in this paper provides a general framework for skills development and for future research. See Table 2 for specific recommendations.

Table 2

Future Research Questions for Communication in Digital Marketing Education

Domain	Future Research Questions
Communication	Knowledge: What are the gaps in communication training and execution? Should marketing educators have separate domains for each communication area? How can AI foster interpersonal communication knowledge? Skills: How can marketing educators best isolate and integrate communication skills? How can faculty connect measures to competency with communication skills? What communication skills in the future will be unique to AI? Tools: What additional communication tools should be listed? How can marketing educators best measure communication skills? How can AI be integrated as a tool to develop communication skills?

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UNDERSTANDING FACULTY ADOPTION OF MARKETING SIMULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper proposes a framework for understanding faculty adoption of marketing simulations. Drawing from marketing education literature, experiential learning theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model, the framework identifies two broad categories of factors that may shape simulation adoption decisions: instructor factors and simulation factors. Instructor factors include self-efficacy, technostress, and prior experience with game-based learning, while simulation factors include ease of use, customer value, and facilitating conditions. The paper argues that faculty adoption decisions are influenced not only by the perceived pedagogical value of simulations but also by implementation concerns related to workload, confidence, and technical support. The paper discusses practical implications for marketing educators and simulation publishers, including strategies to support broader adoption through training, instructional resources, and responsive technical support.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators have long sought instructional approaches that help students apply marketing concepts in realistic business settings. Simulations support experiential learning by letting students practice decision-making, analyze competitive conditions, and observe the consequences of strategic choices in a dynamic marketplace (Pricer, Munoz, & Beck, 2026), aligning with experiential learning theory's emphasis on experience, reflection, and application.

Documented benefits include stronger student involvement, enhanced collaboration, improved strategic thinking, and deeper engagement (Pricer et al., 2026). Despite these benefits, successful integration depends on faculty willingness to adopt and sustain use, which leads to the research question:

RQ: What factors influence faculty decisions to adopt marketing simulations?

We propose a conceptual framework identifying instructor and simulation factors that may shape faculty adoption intentions.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Research on marketing simulations has emphasized experiential learning, with students and faculty alike viewing simulations as engaging, interactive, and authentic (e.g., Farrell, 2020; Vos & Brennan, 2010). Simulations are more effective when instructors adopt

expanded coaching and mentoring roles, guiding students and encouraging reflection throughout gameplay (Tonks, 2002), suggesting effectiveness depends partly on faculty engagement and instructional design.

At the same time, challenges exist. Instructors' concerns include game selection, startup complexity, grading, group dynamics, and debriefing (Gentry et al., 1993), which thoughtful planning can help address (e.g., Bolton et al., 2019; Ganesh & Sun, 2009). Thus, faculty evaluate simulations on both pedagogical value and practical implementation.

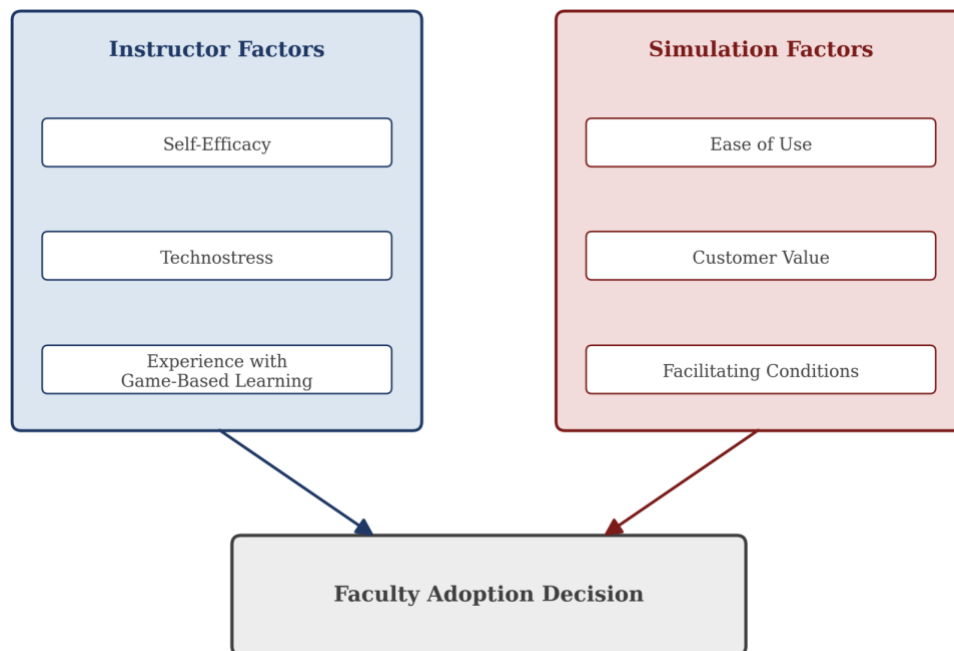
The framework also draws on the Technology Acceptance Model, which holds that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive technology adoption; faculty may be more willing to adopt simulations when they perceive strong student impact and manageable implementation (Srivastava & Sinha, 2022).

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR FACULTY ADOPTION OF SIMULATIONS

The proposed framework positions faculty simulation adoption as being influenced by two primary factors: instructor factors and simulation factors. For instructor factors, four considerations were identified as influencing an instructor's decision to adopt a simulation; for simulation factors, three considerations were identified.

Figure 1

A Conceptual Model of Faculty Adoption of Marketing Simulations



This two-category structure reflects a person-versus-system framing common in technology acceptance research: instructor factors capture attributes internal to the individual, while simulation factors capture attributes of the product itself. We selected

three factors per category to keep the framework tractable for a conference-length paper, a practical rather than theoretical constraint.

Instructor Factors

The simulation adoption decision is influenced by factors beyond the features and benefits of the evaluated games; instructors also weigh their confidence and preparation to implement a simulation in their courses. Specifically, four instructor factors inform this decision: self-efficacy, technostress, experience with game-based learning, and time spent using the simulation.

Self-Efficacy. An instructor's confidence in using a simulation tool effectively predicts adoption intention: educators who feel capable with game-based pedagogy are more likely to continue incorporating games (Srivastava & Sinha, 2022), and higher self-efficacy is associated with perceiving simulations as easier to use, positively shaping attitudes and adoption intentions (Kapoor & Sohi, 2024). Pricer, Munoz, and Beck (2026) note that research has largely overlooked faculty perceptions here, calling for future studies on instructor confidence as a driver of adoption.

Technostress. For some instructors, the psychological strain of struggling to keep pace with rapidly changing technology may be a barrier to adoption, though one study of marketing educators did not find technology-related anxiety a significant deterrent to continuing with game-based pedagogy (Srivastava & Sinha, 2022). The source of this strain may differ by career stage: early-career faculty may experience it as one more demand layered atop developing teaching proficiency, classroom management, and LMS fluency, whereas second-career faculty, who often bring strong technology fluency from industry, are more likely to experience it as unfamiliarity with academic instructional technology specifically, such as LMS integration, classroom facilitation, and grading workflows, rather than a broader discomfort with technology. The “black box quality” of a simulation, its underlying design and algorithms, can itself be a source of this strain, a concern we revisit below under Facilitating Conditions.

Experience with Game-Based Learning. Prior use of simulations can positively or negatively sway adoption decisions. On the positive side, instructors who develop fluency in game-based pedagogy through repeated use often experience a state of flow and are better positioned to leverage confidence and institutional support to sustain adoption (Srivastava & Sinha, 2022). Conversely, a frustrating experience for the instructor or students can deter an instructor from risking a similar experience again. In addition, the length of time, or number of semesters, an instructor has used a given simulation relates to experience. Adoption-related strain is typically highest in the first semester, when an instructor is simultaneously learning the simulation's mechanics and administering it for the first time; strain should ease with repeated use, consistent with the flow-state benefits of experience discussed above.

Simulation Factors

A second group of factors concerns observable characteristics of competing simulation products; faculty judgment of these attributes can affect simulation choice or a decision not to adopt. Three such factors are facilitating conditions, ease of use, and customer value.

Ease of Use. Ease of use refers to faculty perceptions of how easy simulations are to learn, administer, and integrate into existing courses; a steep learning curve can be perceived as added workload. Ease of use strongly influences adoption decisions (Davis, 1989), and faculty tend to be more satisfied with simulations offering intuitive interfaces, clear instructions, and efficient grading. Publishers can ease these concerns through product demonstrations and training.

Customer Value. Instructors also weigh a simulation's perceived value as a pedagogical tool and from the students' perspective. Perceived usefulness influences attitude toward a simulation and, ultimately, intention to adopt it (Davis, 1989), so faculty must also judge students' potential learning impact against benefits relative to price paid.

Facilitating Conditions. A third factor, facilitating conditions, pertains to game administration (Srivastava & Sinha, 2022): setup, teaching resources, assessment capabilities, and technical support. Instructors can appreciate a simulation's intended learning outcomes without knowing how its underlying algorithms produce those outputs; pre-adoption demos, teaching materials, grading templates, and responsive technical support can reduce this uncertainty and instill confidence in adopting the simulation.

CONCLUSION

Simulation adoption decisions are an important, understudied aspect of faculty impact. Existing literature supports the pedagogical value of simulations, yet the faculty experience of implementation remains underexplored. The proposed framework suggests that adoption decisions are shaped by factors personal to the instructor and factors specific to a given game offering: faculty may recognize a simulation's educational advantages while still weighing concerns about workload impact.

Implications for Marketing Educators

The paper's conceptual framework integrates technology acceptance and experiential learning to evaluate factors influencing simulation adoption. From a practical standpoint, the framework highlights strategies that may encourage broader simulation adoption. For example, publishers can positively influence adoption through structured onboarding and demo periods; semester-over-semester support that recognizes first-semester strain; plain-language documentation of how algorithms translate decisions into outputs, reducing the "black box" uncertainty discussed above; and user communities that reduce the isolation of troubleshooting.

Future research should empirically examine these relationships across institution types, course formats, and faculty demographics. Student-side factors such as prior comfort, experience, and cost sensitivity likely weigh more on continued use than on initial adoption, and institutional context, particularly whether a program requires internships, may elevate simulations' perceived value where internship opportunities are limited. Future work should also compare adoption across in-person and online formats and examine simulations' net workload effect, which can be positive (e.g., auto-grading, pre-built templates, structured debriefs) or negative (e.g., troubleshooting, customization, grading overrides) depending on publisher support, as well as how artificial intelligence affects faculty perceptions of simulations.

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USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO DEVELOP IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence is likely both the most beloved and despised tool among teachers today. While we can and should acknowledge the shortcomings of AI, does it also offer benefits to us as educators? And if so, then we must consider what is the best way for professors to use artificial intelligence in their teaching and preparation? This is the question I have been exploring for the past year, and so I am sharing my experiences thus far with using AI to aid in the development and preparation of additional in-class activities. While the initial response and results have been encouraging, further testing and formal research is certainly needed. By continuing to wrestle with this subject, especially those who have not personally tried using AI yet, together we can discover the best uses of AI for educators to increase the level of student engagement in the classroom, both in-person and online.

INTRODUCTION

A significant challenge for those who love to teach, and love what they teach, is that there is not enough time in the day. A potential solution to this problem is to incorporate AI into their classroom preparation. The proposition here is to use AI to help create group classroom activities, which can be easily and immediately tailored to the needs of students. While many textbook providers include basic ideas up to turn-key solutions for in-class activities, most of these remain in a one-size fit all format. With AI, classroom activities can become fully customizable. Using an AI provider to assist in the creation of classroom activities can much more easily meet specific needs such as focus areas and available time.

BACKGROUND

After studying AI and its growing use for some time, I finally began experimenting with it myself and learning more from others. Shortly thereafter, I began working with a small group of colleagues to launch and promote a series of group learning sessions that were designed for and open to other faculty members. There we went through how to use AI, focusing specifically on Microsoft CoPilot which had been included with a Microsoft Office subscription. These were offered during the last semester. Additionally, for those who were interested but could not attend I met with a few individual faculty members and a smaller faculty group to demonstrate basic capabilities of CoPilot for general usage such as creating PowerPoints and more specifically for creating and enhancing classroom group activities.

METHODOLOGY

The process for adopting this innovation is quite simple, in theory. All you must do is set up access to an AI provider (some schools may include access already), provide information about the main discussion points, and start asking AI to help create a classroom activity. Of course, the more detail provided the better, and more practice makes it better. A couple of helpful tips are to clearly state the grade level of students, give a desired length (based on the available time), set preferred formats, and request multiple options to choose from. Once you have settled upon an activity then you can continue chatting to edit it further. For greater ease of use (for educators and students) it is helpful to later ask the AI to turn the activity into a printable worksheet (or it can be added to your slides, an online site, etc.) and can even create a teacher's guide if desired.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The initial results have been very encouraging so far. In an informal classroom poll students shared that they really appreciated the additional classroom activities, and that these are one of their favorite aspects of the course. Since this is such a new practice and innovation in my teaching, I do not have a further history of reports and have not been able to conduct empirical research currently. However, I do strongly believe this topic warrants further research and testing going forward and hope to implement specific plans to do so.

Currently, the greatest lesson about AI use for teaching is that it is time for us to take that leap of faith and jump in. Using AI to assist in creating more engaging classroom activities can save time and improve satisfaction. For those in business and marketing professions especially, industry is leading the adoption of AI and we need to ensure students are ready. What better way to do this than by striving to educate ourselves on AI first?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The biggest challenge, as I have noted in previous MMA presentations, may be our human resistance to change. In other words, we have the means to do much more than ever before, and can master areas much faster, but this area of AI is new and somewhat scary. Moreover, faculty and students who do not have as much familiarity with how computers and machine learning work could find AI services challenging to use. A remedy for this is to spend some time one-on-one with colleagues who are already using AI successfully and who are ready, willing and able to share their knowledge and experience. Going through the process of using AI together in person to develop and enhance classroom learning activities could make all the difference when a group or video tutorial is not enough.

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FROM CASE TO CLASSROOM: USING AI TO SCALE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSET PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators face a familiar problem: case teaching develops applied judgment, but many students resist heavy preparation, and conventional fixes do not fully solve the engagement problem. This session presents one approach using generative AI to build supporting materials around a human-authored case, anchored in a crisis decision case drawn from firsthand commercial leadership experience during March 2020, when a global event services firm saw projected revenue fall by roughly 90 percent within 30 days. Attendees will receive the case packet and the prompts used to generate each AI-produced asset, watch the AI-produced student video, and experience a condensed walk-through of the capstone exercise. The presenter will identify which assets were human-authored and which were AI-produced or co-produced, share how the prompts were developed and refined, discuss the failure modes encountered, and lead discussion on how attendees might apply similar division-of-labor approaches to their own work.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators face a familiar problem. Case teaching develops applied judgment and synthesis, yet many students resist heavy reading and/or written preparation. Quizzes and in-class reading time help, but do not fully solve the engagement problem. A third route is to preserve the rigor of the case while improving how students enter it through supporting assets such as short video, infographics, and visual slide design.

Generative AI offers new production capacity for instructional materials, but only if its role is bounded. The central claim is simple: the most pedagogically consequential work in case development should remain human-led, while generative AI can be used in ways to build delivery assets that improve access, attention, and classroom readiness.

The session is built around a crisis decision-making case the author drew from firsthand commercial leadership experience when a global event services firm saw projected revenue fall by roughly 90 percent within 30 days. The use of AI in this context argues for a deliberate division of labor that protects authenticity while improving instructional delivery — putting human intelligence in the original judgment and pedagogical design.

BACKGROUND

Marketing education research shows strong interest in generative AI, but most work focuses on how AI functions in teaching and learning rather than on how instructors build case materials (Figueiredo & Schonewille, 2025). Generative AI has been framed as tutor, teammate, and tool, with different effects on teaching, social, and cognitive presence (Narang et al., 2025). Broader marketing education work encourages adoption with caution, emphasizing the need to prepare students for workplaces where generative AI is normal while guarding against hallucination, bias, plagiarism, and overreliance (Guha et al., 2024; McAlister et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2024).

A second research stream comes from instructional design and course production. This work consistently finds that AI is most useful in brainstorming, drafting, structuring, and low-stakes production support, while humans remain necessary for contextual accuracy, alignment with learning goals, and final quality control (Chai et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2024; Ullmann et al., 2024). That pattern is especially relevant here because this session is not about outsourcing pedagogical judgment; it is about using AI to help build professionally designed teaching assets around a human-authored case.

A third strand comes from case and live-case pedagogy in marketing. Authentic, practice-based cases are associated with student gains in applied skills including communication, critical thinking, and judgment under pressure (Cummins & Johnson, 2021; Johnson & Cummins, 2022), which matters for a capstone crisis case where the goal is decision-making under uncertainty. Notably, direct works on instructor-centered AI case development remains thin, though emerging studies suggest promise for customization and efficiency when instructors retain control of the pedagogical core (Figueiredo & Schonewille, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

The session is organized as a transparent design case built around a deliberate separation between human substance and AI production. Three tasks were kept human-led because they required contextual fidelity, practical judgment, and editorial ownership: writing the case narrative from lived experience, designing the capstone exercise, and making teaching decisions about pacing, prompts, and learning goals. AI tools entered only after the pedagogical core was established, and outputs at every stage were reviewed and edited by the instructor — consistent with literature showing that generative AI can accelerate first drafts but cannot be trusted to deliver contextually sound final materials without oversight (Chai et al., 2025; Ullmann et al., 2024).

Attendee Experience

The session is built around the case itself rather than abstract discussion of AI. The presenter will open with a short framing of the workflow, then walk attendees through a condensed version of how the capstone runs in class. The AI-produced video will be played so attendees see what the tool produced. The accompanying AI generated infographic visuals and slide design will be shown alongside the human-authored case content. The

presenter will identify which elements were human-authored and which were AI-produced and will name failure modes encountered during development (e.g. infographic typos despite correctly-spelled inputs, iteration cost on the video build, and editorial decisions required for slide design). The final portion opens discussion on how attendees might apply similar division-of-labor approaches in their own case work and share experiences with AI tools in instructional design.

CONCLUSION

This session offers a worked example for marketing educators who want to increase case engagement and reduce preparation cycles—without surrendering instructional judgment using AI platforms. The workflow aligns with current calls for transparency and ethical clarity in university AI use (Chan, 2023) and is consistent with empirical findings that disclosure of AI authorship affects how students perceive AI-generated educational materials (Kim & Koo, 2024).

Three lessons emerged from the development process. First, AI did not generate the case substance—the narrative, exhibits, exercise design, and pedagogical sequence were all human-authored. Second, the value of AI in this workflow was not only time savings but capability access: the student video and infographic visuals were assets the instructor could not have produced independently, regardless of time invested. Third, AI tools introduced errors even on tasks they should handle reliably, requiring sustained editorial oversight at every stage.

The practical lesson is straightforward. Intentional human direction and accountability remain non-negotiable, but strategic AI integration can expand what educators deliver—producing multimodal materials that increase student engagement and accommodate diverse learning styles without compromising pedagogical integrity or ethical transparency.

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THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF TEACHING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING SKILLS THROUGH LINKEDIN

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators can help students develop networking and personal branding skills prior to graduation. LinkedIn can play a useful role in this process, but undergraduates are typically not taking advantage of the site's potential. Previous studies have discussed assignments using LinkedIn as a tool to teach professional networking, but these did not track future intentions and whether site usage continued after the assessment's completion. This research details an assignment requiring undergraduates to create LinkedIn accounts, establish networks, and perform tasks likely to result in long-term professional benefits. After the assignment intervention, students reported intent for ongoing LinkedIn usage, and they continued to grow their network of connections significantly in the subsequent months and years.

INTRODUCTION

The best time for undergraduates to begin developing a professional network is while they are in school, rather than waiting for graduation. Marketing educators have the opportunity to help students learn personal branding skills, including the ability to establish a network of career connections and to communicate a professional image (Black et al., 2023; Leo et al., 2024). One popular method for teaching these skills is to require the use of a professional social networking site (SNS) such as LinkedIn.

Since the mid-2010s, marketing educators have regularly used LinkedIn and other SNSs in course assessments (Parker & James, 2024), but it is not known whether students who are required to engage in professional networking continue that behavior after the course has ended. Some usage attrition seems unavoidable, but if students are not continuing to use LinkedIn, this kind of assessment may lack long-term value. Our study addressed this gap in understanding. We required students to use LinkedIn actively, gathered data on pre- and post-surveys, and then measured growth in number of account connections at the end of the research period.

BACKGROUND

Americans under 30 have the lowest LinkedIn usage of any age segment currently in the workforce (Gottfried, 2024). Previous studies have found that undergraduates have low awareness of LinkedIn and its potential value for professional networking (McCorkle & McCorkle, 2012; Florenthal, 2015) and do not utilize the site to its full potential (Carmack &

Heiss, 2018; Daniels et al., 2023). Several researchers have discussed course assignments similar to the one detailed herein; all required students to create a LinkedIn account, take certain actions, and submit documentation of those activities (including Gerard, 2012; McCorkle & McCorkle, 2012; and Peterson & Dover, 2014). Students in all studies expressed general satisfaction with the experience, but the extant literature did not track subsequent professional networking intent or behavior after assessment completion.

METHODOLOGY

The target population for this longitudinal study was undergraduate students in a Principles of Marketing course at a small university in the midwestern U.S from September 2022 through March 2026. This study consisted of four phases (pre-survey, intervention, post-survey, and follow-up); protocol was reviewed and declared to be exempt by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and all IRB requirements were followed.

Phase 1 - Pre-Survey

The lead researcher introduced the study to each course section, reminding students of the public nature of all social media posts. The secondary researcher then explained the students' rights under IRB standards, including the option not to participate. Students who agreed to take part signed a consent form describing the study protocol and their rights. Participants then completed the pre-survey during class time using Qualtrics software. The pre-survey instrument included demographic variables and items regarding current use of social networks (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Those who indicated having a LinkedIn account were asked about past usage (Gerard, 2012). The remainder covered current perceptions of LinkedIn's potential value (Neier & Zayer, 2015) and the likelihood of the site offering certain benefits (adapted from Kilian & Langner, 2012).

Phase 2 - Intervention

A representative from the campus Career Services office presented information about professional networking, LinkedIn, and the importance of building a network prior to graduation. This presentation was a framing device for the assignment, rather than a driver of outcomes. Students were provided four weeks for assignment completion, which included creation of a LinkedIn account (or updating an existing one); completing the About, Education, Experience, and Skills sections of their profile; adding a minimum of 40 connections; joining a group; posting two account updates; and obtaining a recommendation. Expectations were based on LinkedIn's definition of an optimized account required to gain benefits from site usage (LinkedIn, 2026). At the completion of the assignment, students submitted a written reflection displaying screenshots from their account to demonstrate the completion of requirements.

Phase 3 - Post-survey

The next week, participants completed a Qualtrics post-survey containing many of the same items on demographics, site usage, and perceptions about value. New items were

added about the importance of LinkedIn features (Gerard, 2012), and it concluded by asking about future usage intentions.

Phase 4 - Follow-up

At the conclusion of the research period in March 2026, the team recorded the current number of LinkedIn connections for each student participant. Data were gathered by reviewing the student's public LinkedIn profile; if "500+" was shown as the number of connections, the number was documented as 500.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Across the six semesters of this longitudinal study, 316 students enrolled in the Principles of Marketing course. Of these, 152 students (48.1% of those enrolled) completed consent forms to take part, with 124 participants (81.6%) then completing pre-surveys and 122 (80.3%) submitting post-surveys. Participants were generally reflective of the university's overall enrollment in terms of gender and ethnicity.

While most on the pre-survey reported already having a LinkedIn account (66.9%), they typically were not active users. The majority had fewer than 25 connections and rarely posted updates. During the post-survey conducted after the intervention, account usage had increased. Over two-thirds of respondents (77%) now had at least 26 connections and some (18.9%) reported more than 100 connections. Common account uses reported were: looked for people I know (99.2%), looked up companies (93.4%), posted updates about my activities (86.1%), and searched for internships (51.6%). Of the post-survey respondents, 99 (81.1%) indicated they planned to use the site more often or the same amount during the next year, and 106 participants (86.9%) indicated they would use LinkedIn the same amount or more after graduation.

Of the 152 original participants, LinkedIn profiles for 134 participants (88.2%) could be identified during the follow-up data collection. Of these, 132 profiles (98.51%) reflected significant increases in the number of connections from the time of assignment submission to end of research period ($p = 0.0000$).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Other marketing educators desiring to build positive professional networking habits may consider a similar assessment. Our study and the extant literature suggest that students are willing to complete an account profile and conduct networking activities when required, and report generally positive experiences. Some kind of usage attrition can be expected, but students are likely to continue growing their account networks, which is one measure of the formation of positive new habits. Number of connections is not a complete measure, however; future studies may also want to track factors such as frequency of account updates or comments. Only about half of enrolled students consented to participate in the study, which limits generalizability of findings. Expectations for an optimized site were based on LinkedIn's standards at the time of the study; others adopting this assessment may find that standards have changed.

Educators may want to consider utilizing a ladder approach, in which LinkedIn is introduced early in the curriculum, such as in an Introduction to Business or Principles of Marketing course. Then subsequent professional networking assessments could be implemented in later courses such as Digital Marketing or Marketing Research. This study did not explore factors influencing the continued use of LinkedIn. Additional research may help to identify demographic or other characteristics that impact future professional networking, such as having a LinkedIn account prior to the intervention, year in school, or existing attitudes regarding the value of networking. In addition, analyzing LinkedIn accounts of all students in a university's business program and comparing those who were required to use the site to those who were not may also yield useful insights.

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HUMAN-CENTERED AI COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AT SCALE: A PILOT STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines implementation of AI-supported collaborative learning in a large undergraduate Marketing course enrolling 1,200 students per semester. Delivered in a flipped format, the course combines asynchronous video instruction with limited, application-focused synchronous learning experiences. An AI-supported small-group discussion platform was integrated to facilitate collaboration and support scalable assessment. Drawing on systematic qualitative analysis of more than 1,500 student reflections, the study examines student experiences with collaboration, discussion structure, and AI-mediated evaluation. Findings indicate that structured prompts and peer interaction enhanced conceptual understanding, application, and engagement, while student perceptions of AI-based grading reflected ambivalence related to transparency and fairness. Building on student-centered research on AI grading, the research proposes a human-centered model positioning AI as enabling infrastructure for collaboration rather than as an autonomous evaluator and discusses implications for marketing educators teaching at scale.

INTRODUCTION

Large-enrollment undergraduate marketing courses play a vital role in business education yet present persistent challenges related to student engagement, collaboration, individual learning, and assessment. Extensive research demonstrates that collaborative learning supports deeper understanding, perspective-taking, and retention; however, these benefits are difficult to realize consistently at scale (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2014; Scager et al., 2016), and that individualized instruction is critical for providing tailored feedback and supporting student-specific learning needs (Wisniewski, Zierer, & Hattie, 2020). Although both approaches independently enhance learning outcomes, they are difficult to integrate effectively at scale. This research advances marketing education scholarship by reframing artificial intelligence (AI) as pedagogical infrastructure that supports collaborative sensemaking at scale. The study illustrates how thoughtfully designed AI scaffolding can sustain human-centered collaborative learning in large-scale course environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Flipped classroom designs have emerged as a response, enabling content delivery to scale while reserving synchronous time for application and interaction (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). However, flipped structures alone do not ensure meaningful engagement, particularly when discussion is under-scaffolded or loosely facilitated (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018). Recent advances in AI have prompted educators to experiment with AI-supported discussion and assessment tools. Prior research suggests that student acceptance of AI-mediated assessment depends not on automation itself, but on perceptions of fairness, transparency, and human oversight (Biri et al., 2025; Riahi, Storozhevyykh & Cateté, 2026). While this work has focused primarily on individual assessment contexts, less is known about how students experience AI when it is embedded within collaborative, discussion-based learning environments.

Grounded in collaborative learning theory and human-centered AI scholarship, this study conceptualizes AI as pedagogical infrastructure that structures interaction and documentation while preserving human judgment as the interpretive authority (Johnson et al., 2014; Riahi et al., 2026). Extending the student-centered insights of Riahi et al., (2026) into the domain of collaborative learning, this paper examines how students experience AI-supported discussion, group interaction, and evaluation in a large, flipped undergraduate marketing course.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in a large undergraduate Principles of Marketing course enrolling 1,200 students per semester. The course used a flipped model, with most content delivered asynchronously (Lage et al., 2000; Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018) and five applied learning sessions held during the semester. Students met in six 200-student lab sections and worked in assigned teams of seven. During the pilot semester, teams also participated in five synchronous AI-supported online discussions following assigned readings and a pre-discussion quiz. The platform facilitated structured prompts, polls, and collaborative activities, while participation analytics contributed to the discussion grade.

Following participation in the discussion activity, students completed open-ended reflection prompts addressing what they liked about the discussion, what they would change, and how their group impacted their learning. More than 1,500 qualitative responses were collected and analyzed using iterative thematic analysis until thematic saturation was reached. A summary of the resulting emergent themes with representative quotations are in Table 3.

Table 1*Comparison of Collaborative Learning Design: Fall 2025*

Category	Description
Structure	• 16-week semester • Five face-to-face lab meetings (200-student sections) • Established teams of 7 students per section • No online collaborative activity between meetings • No AI-supported facilitation or assessment
Collaboration Pattern	• Low collaboration density: Interaction limited to five discrete class sessions • Temporal compression: Extended gaps between collaborative opportunities (2–3 weeks) • Single-mode interaction: In-person only
Theoretical Annotation	• Collaboration density (low): Limited frequency restricts opportunities for iterative knowledge construction. • Scaffolding (minimal): Interaction relies primarily on peer initiative and instructor presence. • Cognitive engagement: Learning is concentrated during in-class sessions, with fewer structured opportunities for articulation or elaboration outside class.

Note. Content reflects the Fall 2025 collaboration model used in the pilot study.

Table 2

Comparison of Collaborative Learning Design: Spring 2026 Hybrid Collaboration with AI-Supported Online Discussions

Category	Description
Structure	• Same 16-week semester and 5 face-to-face lab meetings • Identical team structure (established teams of 7; 200-student lab sections) • Five additional AI-supported synchronous online group discussions, each occurring one week after its corresponding in-class lab
AI-Supported Discussion Design	• Required pre-work (textbook readings + <i>Wall Street Journal</i> article) • Mandatory completion of quiz as access gate to video discussion • 45-minute synchronous video discussion • AI-generated analytics track: ○ Attendance duration ○ Microphone and camera activation ○ Individual talk time ○ Use of course concepts • AI-based evaluation accounts for 20% of discussion grade
Collaboration Pattern	• High collaboration density: 10 structured collaborative events (5 face-to-face + 5 online) • Distributed interaction: Regular, spaced collaborative engagement across the semester • Multimodal interaction: In-person and synchronous online discussion
Theoretical Annotation	• Collaboration density (high): Increased frequency supports repeated articulation, comparison of perspectives, and reinforcement of concepts. • Scaffolding (explicit): Pre-work quizzes, structured prompts, and enforced participation norms reduce coordination costs and support equitable engagement. • Accountability mechanisms: AI-generated participation metrics promote preparation and sustained engagement. • Human-centered AI role: AI functions as <i>infrastructure</i>—organizing interaction and documenting engagement—while human judgment remains central to learning meaning-making.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Value of Peer Collaboration

Students valued peer interaction because multiple perspectives clarified concepts and revealed overlooked considerations, echoing collaborative learning research linking peer discourse to deeper processing. (Johnson et al., 2014; Scager et al., 2016).

Structure as a Catalyst for Engagement

The students overwhelmingly valued the structured nature of the AI-supported discussions. Guided prompts and visual pacing reduced their confusion and encouraged their participation, consistent with research demonstrating the limitations of minimally guided instruction (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). One student remarked, *“If it was a free discussion, it would have been confusing.”*

Group Impact on Learning

Students attributed learning gains to articulation, application, and accountability. Explaining concepts aloud clarified understanding, while group dialogue facilitated application of marketing frameworks to real-world cases. These mechanisms were repeatedly cited as improving confidence and retention.

Student-Identified Areas for Improvement

Although overall perceptions were positive, students identified pacing, turn-taking, and technical friction as areas for improvement. These critiques reinforce the importance of deliberate scaffolding in technology-mediated collaboration rather than reliance on spontaneous interaction alone (Kirschner et al., 2006).

Perceptions of AI-Based Grading

Students expressed ambivalence toward AI-based grading. Although analytics promoted accountability, many viewed evaluation as opaque and questioned whether AI could assess participation fairly. This aligns with research (Riahi et al., (2026)), showing that trust depends on transparency, consistency, and human oversight.

Table 3*Emergent Themes from Student Reflections on AI-Supported Group Discussions*

Theme	Subtheme	Representative Student Quotes
Peer Collaboration	Multiple perspectives	"It allowed me to hear their perspectives and catch something I may have missed."
Conceptual Clarification	Verbal articulation	"I had to deeply understand the topic to explain my reasoning."
Application	Real-world learning	"Discussing Crocs showed how marketing strategies change across cultures."
Engagement	Accountability	"I prepared more because I knew I'd have to discuss it."
Structure	Guided prompts	"I liked that it wasn't a free discussion."
AI Grading	Transparency concerns	"It's unclear what the AI is actually measuring."

Note: Representative quotations were selected through inductive thematic analysis to reflect dominant patterns across student responses. Quotes were lightly edited for clarity while preserving original meaning.

Analytic Summary of Emergent Themes

The themes summarized in Table 1 indicate that learning gains were driven primarily by structured peer interaction rather than automation itself. AI functioned most effectively as enabling infrastructure that reduced coordination costs and supported engagement, while resistance to AI-based grading reflected concerns about interpretive fairness rather than rejection of AI per se. These findings extend Riahi et al.,(2026) student-centered framework into collaborative learning contexts, demonstrating that trust in AI is contingent on preserving human evaluative authority.

Methods Note: Selection of Representative Quotes

Quotes were selected through an inductive, multi-stage qualitative analysis process. All responses were coded to identify recurring themes, and representative quotations were chosen to reflect dominant patterns rather than isolated opinions. Quotes were lightly edited for clarity while preserving original meaning.

Implications for Theory or Practice

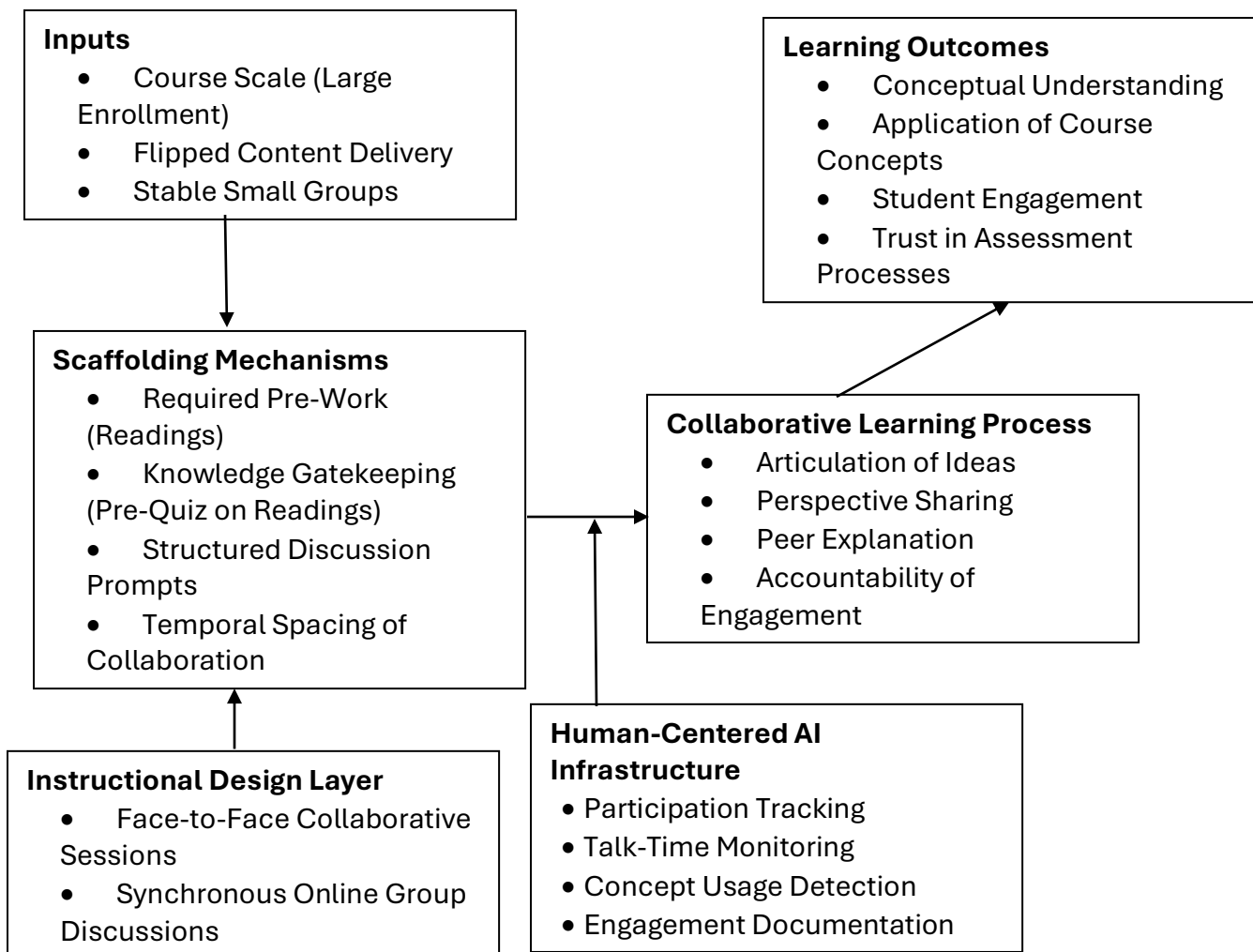
The findings support a human-in-the-loop model of AI use in marketing education, wherein AI structures interaction and participation documentation while instructors retain interpretive and evaluative authority (Riahi et al.,2026). For large enrollment courses, effective AI-supported collaboration requires structured prompts, explicit interaction norms, and transparent assessment aligned with collaborative learning theory (Johnson et al., 2014).

This study demonstrates that meaningful collaborative learning is achievable at scale in flipped undergraduate marketing courses when supported by intentional design and human-centered AI infrastructure. By enabling collaboration rather than replacing judgment, AI can enhance engagement and learning while preserving student trust. These insights are transferable to other large-scale, applied courses navigating the expanding role of AI in higher education.

Figure 1 presents a human-centered model of AI-supported collaboration at scale, positioning AI as infrastructure that scaffolds participation and documents engagement while preserving instructor judgment.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Human-Centered AI-Supported Collaboration at Scale



Note: AI assists but does not replace instructor judgment

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AN EXPLORATORY CLASSROOM-BASED COMPARISON OF GUIDED LLM PROMPTING IN ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS MBA MARKETING CASE ASSIGNMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Case Method helps MBA students evaluate alternatives, engage multiple perspectives, and make decisions under uncertainty, but these elements can be difficult to preserve in asynchronous online courses. We examine a guided large-language-model (LLM) prompting case assignment designed to use generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) to generate and evaluate alternative perspectives rather than replace students' reasoning. A study conducted in MBA-level Marketing Management courses at two Northeastern U.S. universities compared Async, LLM; Async, No LLM; and Hybrid, No LLM instructional formats. Students in the Async, LLM format reported higher perceived self-directed learning than students in both comparison conditions, while no significant overall differences emerged for collaborative learning, problem solving, or critical thinking. Findings suggest that guided LLM prompting may support perceived self-directed learning and independent case preparation while preserving students' responsibility for analysis and judgment.

INTRODUCTION

The Case Method remains central to Master of Business Administration (MBA) education because it helps students evaluate alternatives, engage multiple perspectives, and make decisions under uncertainty (AACSB International, n.d.; Farashahi & Tajeddin, 2018). In MBA-level marketing education, these demands are particularly salient because students must interpret complex market information, balance trade-offs across customers, competitors, and the marketing mix, and defend a strategic course of action. However, as enrollment shifts toward online MBA formats (Harland, 2026), these discussion-based and perspective-taking elements become more difficult to preserve.

Meanwhile, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has intensified this challenge: students are already using these tools in their academic work (Qu et al., 2025), often in ways that can bypass the deeper reasoning the Case Method is meant to develop (OECD, 2026). Although several high-profile business schools have implemented GenAI-supported case tools, many initiatives require substantial technical and institutional resources (Ellis, 2025; Sebesta, 2025). Thus, we ask: How does a structured GenAI-assisted approach, in which students are guided to prompt large language models (LLMs) to generate and evaluate alternative perspectives, affect problem-based learning outcomes in asynchronous online MBA marketing case courses?

BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

Our proposed innovation is a guided LLM prompting case assignment designed for asynchronous online MBA case courses. Specifically, this assignment implements guided LLM prompting as a structured tool for generating alternative perspectives, critiquing those perspectives, and helping students refine their own thinking.

Students begin by using LLMs of their choice to generate three distinct strategic recommendations for the assigned case using provided prompting frameworks. They then summarize the core idea and features of each recommendation and compare them using a structured marketing framework centered on customer, company, competitors, and the marketing mix. The assignment explicitly informs students to remain grounded in the facts of the case and reminds them that GenAI may hallucinate.

Instead of selecting the recommendation that sounds best, students must identify three limitations for each AI-generated idea and evaluate how those weaknesses would affect its feasibility or likely success. In effect, the AI-generated ideas become something to interrogate rather than something to accept. Students also complete a brief meta-reflection on what the model got wrong, what they improved, and how their judgment evolved. Finally, students write a one-page case memo presenting their own recommendation, supported by case evidence and marketing concepts.

Together, our proposed innovation positions AI-generated outputs as something students must evaluate, challenge, and learn from, rather than as a tool that does the thinking for them. Thus, it keeps the intellectual center of the Case Method intact while adapting it to online asynchronous settings.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted a study in Fall 2025 at two Northeastern U.S. universities to assess our proposed innovation's effectiveness on problem-based learning outcomes. Using a randomized, between-subjects design, each class was randomly assigned a condition that varied in the integration of GenAI for the case assignment. Both MBA-level Marketing Management courses were delivered asynchronously online and used the same assignment materials, including case analyses, worksheets, and grading rubrics.

Students were in one of three instructional formats: Async, LLM (N = 34), Async, No LLM (N = 29), or Hybrid, No LLM (N = 19). Students in the Hybrid condition completed the same case assignments without GenAI but participated in instructor-led in-person case discussions and debriefs, providing a benchmark for the learning benefits typically associated with in-person case discussion.

Perceived problem-based learning outcomes were measured using an adapted version of Lin and Chapman's (2020) scale. Four-item measures assessed problem solving, critical thinking, self-directed learning, and collaborative learning using 7-point response scales. Internal consistency was acceptable to high across the four measures (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80-.89$), and composite scores were calculated by averaging items within each construct. Because normality testing indicated non-normality across several conditions and outcomes, Kruskal-Wallis tests with Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc comparisons were used. Analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 31.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Students in the Async, LLM format reported the highest self-directed learning ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.00$), followed by Hybrid, No LLM ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 0.97$) and Async, No LLM ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.52$). The Kruskal-Wallis test showed a significant difference across formats, $H(2) = 7.54$, $p = .023$. Dunn-Bonferroni comparisons indicated higher self-directed learning in Async, LLM than in both Async, No LLM ($p = .018$) and Hybrid, No LLM ($p = .026$).

No significant omnibus differences emerged for collaborative learning, $H(2) = 4.41$, $p = .11$, problem solving, $H(2) = 2.12$, $p = .347$, or critical thinking, $H(2) = 2.07$, $p = .357$. Exploratory post hoc analysis for collaborative learning suggested that students in Hybrid, No LLM reported higher collaborative learning than those in Async, No LLM ($p = .036$), although this pattern should be interpreted cautiously given the nonsignificant omnibus test. No other pairwise differences were significant.

Together, findings suggest that guided LLM prompting is best understood as support for perceived self-directed learning and independent case preparation rather than as a replacement for the collaborative and higher-order learning processes central to case-based learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

One strength of our proposed innovation is that it is relatively easy to adapt. It relies on widely available LLMs rather than custom-built systems and does not require a complete course redesign. A straightforward adoption process is to: (1) assign a marketing case requiring strategic analysis and recommendation; (2) ask students to generate three different strategic recommendations using an LLM; (3) require comparison of those recommendations using course frameworks; (4) ask students to identify what the model got wrong or oversimplified; and (5) require a final memo reflecting the student's own reasoning, evidence use, and synthesis.

At the same time, guided LLM prompting does not appear sufficient on its own to strengthen perceived problem solving, critical thinking, or collaborative learning. Stronger gains may depend on how these supports are sequenced and reinforced (Vendrell & Johnston, 2026), such as requiring an initial case analysis before GenAI use, tracking prompt revisions, and reflecting more explicitly on limitations in AI-generated outputs. Collaborative learning may likewise require deliberate facilitation and structured peer interaction (Li et al., 2021; Nevgi et al., 2006).

These findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. Learning outcomes were assessed using students' self-reports rather than objective performance measures, and the relatively small sample limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study was conducted within MBA-level marketing courses at two universities. Accordingly, the results are best viewed as exploratory evidence regarding how guided LLM prompting may support perceived learning outcomes in asynchronous case-based instruction.

As AACSB International (2025) places increased emphasis on GenAI-integrated curricular innovation and workforce preparedness, these findings suggest that the value of

GenAI in asynchronous MBA-level marketing curricula may lie in complementing specific dimensions of learning while preserving students' responsibility for analysis and judgment.

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AI SKILLS EMPLOYERS EXPECT IN MARKETING AND OTHER BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Academic research, popular press, and business leaders clearly indicate that the nature of the work is changing as more organizations adopt artificial intelligence (AI) and deploy it across multiple functions. Along with this, expectations of new hires are evolving, and thus expectations of business education, particularly in marketing, are changing. This research provides new survey data that clarifies how professionals are using AI across different functional areas and what types of AI skills professionals expect of new hires for different functional roles. Implications of these findings for marketing and business education, in general, are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly evolving impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in business is causing a rethinking of what skills are expected of marketing graduates (Schlegelmich & Mills, 2025), leading to broad changes in marketing curriculum (Barger et al., 2025). Simultaneously, research shows full-time faculty feel overwhelmed with the growing list of demands expectations they face (Blair et al., 2024). In such an era, there is tremendous value in aligning curriculum with insights from industry (Mehmet et al., 2025) and in providing faculty clarity on what industry expects of graduates. The current research addresses these challenges. It reports findings from a survey of professionals in the Midwest, providing insights into current AI usage across functional areas and what AI skills are expected for new employees. The research compares AI usage in marketing and sales careers relative to other fields and analyzes AI skills expected of new hires across fields.

BACKGROUND

In 2025 a special issue of *Journal of Marketing Education* focused on AI and the future of marketing education and *Marketing Education Review* published several articles on the topic. Additionally, debates are growing over the potential for AI to take entry level jobs from college graduates (Edmondson & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2025). Clearly, there is great value in clarifying how AI is used in different functional areas and what AI skills are expected of new hires. The current research provides survey data from 2026 exploring these topics and discusses implications for marketing education and business education in general. This is an exploratory study intended to provide timely data which can help full-time faculty

develop a clearer understanding of industry expectations of business graduates, and by extension, business curriculum in different areas.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a survey methodology and convenience sampling, with intentional efforts to sample a broad cross section of employers in part of the Midwest. University advisory boards and outreach and engagement offices as well as a regional economic development organization assisted in soliciting responses to an online survey distributed via email. In all, 14,054 emails invitations were sent, 171 surveys were started, and 139 surveys were completed during a two-week period in the first quarter of 2026. The survey contained 42 primary questions, and portions of the survey results are used for the current research. Table 1 summarizes the profile of organizations represented in this study and Table 2 summarizes the respondent profile.

Table 1

Organizational Profile

Variable	n	%
Organizational Size		
Fewer than 50 employees	61	44
50 - 99 employees	21	15
100 - 199 employees	19	14
200 - 499 employees	11	8
500 - 999 employees	6	4
1,000 - 4,999 employees	12	9
5,000 or more employees	9	6
Boundaries of Operations		
Regional, Midwest - We tend to conduct business mainly in the Midwest, and our customer base tends to be concentrated across the Midwest.	69	50
International - We conduct business in more than one country, and our customer base tends to be spread across more than only country.	29	21
National - We conduct business in one country, and our customer base tends to be spread across a single country.	28	20
Regional, beyond the Midwest - We tend to conduct business in one or more regional areas, and our customer base tends to be concentrated across one or more regional areas.	13	9

Note. N = 139.

Table 2*Respondent Profile*

Variable	n	%
Sex		
Male	59	42
Female	79	55
Prefer not to say	3	2
Age		
18-29	7	5
30-45	52	37
46-61	56	40
62-80	23	17
81 or older	1	1
Functional area of work		
Executive leadership	33	24
Accounting and finance	21	15
Marketing, sales, hospitality, customer service	18	13
Manufacturing, production, operation management, logistics	13	9
Human resources	12	9
Multi-functional (2 or more listed areas, but not an executive leader)	12	9
Other	8	6
Clinical and health care	6	4
Education and training	5	4
Legal services	4	3
Research and development	4	3
Information technology	3	2
Position within the organization		
Director	26	19
President, CEO	25	18
Manager	19	14
Vice President	19	14
Other (please specify)	19	14
Administrator	12	9
Coordinator	7	5
Partner	6	4
Supervisor	3	2
Legal counsel	2	1
Doctor, physician	1	1

Note. N = 139.

Prior to conducting analysis based on functional areas of work, each respondent was categorized into one of 12 unique functional work areas (see Table 2) such that each respondent is categorized in a single work area. If person works in “Executive leadership” and other areas, then they are only counted as “executive leadership”. If person works across multiple areas in this list (but not as in “executive leadership”), they are categorized as “Multi-functional”.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Most areas report the same top three uses for AI (see Figure 1). This indicates, at a minimum, all college graduates should be equipped to effectively use AI to assist with communications, enhance general research, and generate ideas. Respondents who identified as working in marketing, sales, hospitality, or customer service identified using AI to generate reports or documents as the fourth most frequent use. For broader context, Table 3 shows the aggregate frequency with which respondents reported using AI across 14 different usage areas.

In addition to the current use of AI, we also analyze what AI skills people expect of new hires across various roles for which they hire. Whereas the data in Figure 1 and Table 3 reveal current uses of AI, this analysis provides a forward-looking view of workforce demand for AI skills across work areas.

Only people who have input on hiring people who report directly to them provided this data (N = 104). Each respondent separately identified the expected AI skills for a new employee in each role for which they had input. Respondents were given a list of 14 specific AI skills as well as the option to indicate “None – I do not expect AI skills for this role” and “Other”. Figure 2 breaks down the frequency with which specific AI skills were indicated as expected for a given role. The sample size for the number of people who gave input for each column is noted in parentheses in the respective column.

Analysis of Figure 2 reveals that AI skill expectations vary significantly across work roles. The top 6 AI skills for marketing and sales roles are the same, though: basic AI literacy, AI-assisted communication skills, ethical use of AI, AI-assisted creative skills, legal use of AI, and general AI-powered research skills. In this data, those who hire for customer support/service and hospitality roles reveal a much different expectations or AI skills in these areas compared to marketing and sales roles. In fact, 59% of those hiring in customer support/service and hospitality roles indicate they do not expect AI skills for such roles.

These results provide rich opportunities for educators throughout business schools to better connect their curriculum with workforce expectations for their graduates. One area where collaboration across disciplines would be valuable is in defining and teaching a set of skills and knowledge that make up basic AI literacy. Basic AI literacy is one of the most frequent expectations of new hires across functional roles. Additionally, the results indicate that collaboration across disciplines on preparing students to use AI ethically and legally is valuable.

Figure 1*Top 3 Most Frequently Reported Uses of AI at Work by Functional Area*

Functional Area (N = 139)	Most Frequent AI Use	2nd Most Frequent AI Use	3rd Most Frequent AI Use
Marketing / Sales / Hospitality / Customer Service (n=18)	AI-assisted communications (89%)*	AI-powered research (67%)	Generating ideas (56%)
Accounting & Finance (n=21)	AI-assisted communications (67%)	AI-powered research (67%)	Generating ideas (48%)
Clinical & Health Care (n=6)	AI-assisted communications (67%)	AI-powered research (67%)	Generating ideas (50%)
Executive Leadership (n=33)	AI-assisted communications (79%)	AI-powered research (79%)	Generating ideas (61%)
Information Technology (n=3)	AI-assisted communications (100%)	AI-powered research (100%)	Generating ideas (100%)
Human Resources (n=12)	Generating ideas (83%)	AI-assisted communications (75%)	Creating/editing images (67%)
Legal Services (n=4)	AI-assisted communications (100%)	AI-powered research (100%)	Generating reports/documents (75%)
Manufacturing / Operations / Logistics (n=13)	AI-assisted communications (92%)	Generating ideas (69%)	Generating reports/documents (69%)
Research & Development (n=4)	Generating reports/documents (100%)	AI-assisted communications (75%)	AI-powered research (75%)
Education & Training (n=5)	AI-assisted communications (60%)	Generating ideas (60%)	Creating/editing images (40%)
Other (n=8)	AI-assisted communications (50%)	AI-powered research (50%)	Generating ideas (38%)
Multi-Functional (n=12)	AI-assisted communications (83%)	AI-powered research (75%)	Generating ideas (50%)

*Percentages indicate the percent of respondents in the respective functional area who reported using AI for the specified purpose (total sample size for each functional area shown in the 1st column in each row). For example, 89% of the respondents working in Marketing/Sales/Hospitality/Customer Service functional area reported the use of “AI-assisted communications” at work. From the same group, 67% reported the use of “AI-powered research” at work.

Figure 2:

Frequency with Which Those with Hiring Input Report Various AI Skills As Being Expected of New Hires Across Different Work Roles

AI Skill	Marketing (n=29)*	Sales (n=28)	Information technology (n=17)	Creative or design (n = 20)	Education or training (n=12)	Operations, logistics, or analytics (n=27)	Accounting or Finance (n=39)
Basic AI literacy	79%^	71%	59%	60%	50%	70%	69%
AI-assisted communication skills	69%	54%	59%	55%	50%	44%	28%
Ethical use of AI	59%	36%	71%	55%	50%	37%	41%
AI-assisted creative skills	48%	32%	35%	50%	33%	7%	0%
Legal use of AI	45%	21%	53%	35%	42%	37%	28%
General AI-powered research skills	34%	36%	65%	45%	33%	19%	26%
AI-powered data and analytics skills for quantitative data	28%	11%	59%	15%	17%	19%	15%
Customer-facing AI skills	24%	14%	35%	15%	17%	4%	3%
AI tool evaluation	14%	7%	53%	15%	8%	11%	8%
Develop AI strategy recommendations	14%	4%	41%	15%	8%	7%	5%
AI-powered data and analytics skills for textual data	10%	11%	59%	20%	8%	22%	10%
Workflow automation	10%	18%	41%	15%	0%	15%	13%
Use AI agents	10%	11%	41%	10%	8%	11%	5%
None - I do not expect AI skills for this role	10%	18%	18%	30%	33%	22%	21%
AI-assisted coding	3%	0%	47%	5%	8%	7%	0%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%

* For each work role, n is the number of people who indicated they had input on new hires for the work role stated in the column heading.

^ Each percentage represents the percent of people with hiring input on the specific work role who indicated that the specific AI-based skill is expected for new hires in that work role.

Figure 2 (continued):

Frequency with Which Those with Hiring Input Report Various AI Skills As Being Expected of New Hires Across Different Work Roles

AI Skill	Adminis- trative or clerical (n=43)	Clinical, healthcare, or caregiving (n=11)	Customer support/ service or hospitality (n=32)	Manufac- turing (n=7)	Legal (n=10)	Other (n=18)	Engineering (n=7)
Basic AI literacy	53%	55%	63%	14%	40%	67%	71%
None - I do not expect AI skills for this role	35%	36%	59%	71%	30%	28%	29%
AI-assisted communication skills	44%	36%	47%	29%	60%	33%	29%
Ethical use of AI	33%	18%	34%	0%	50%	61%	43%
Legal use of AI	26%	18%	28%	0%	60%	50%	43%
General AI- powered research skills	19%	18%	22%	14%	50%	33%	43%
Customer-facing AI skills	7%	0%	16%	0%	0%	6%	14%
AI-assisted creative skills	14%	9%	13%	0%	20%	22%	29%
AI-powered data and analytics skills for quantitative data	7%	9%	6%	14%	20%	22%	43%
AI-powered data and analytics skills for textual data	5%	9%	6%	29%	30%	22%	43%
Workflow automation skills	7%	9%	6%	14%	10%	11%	29%
Use AI agents	5%	0%	6%	14%	0%	0%	14%
AI-assisted coding	0%	0%	6%	14%	0%	0%	14%
AI tool evaluation	5%	0%	3%	14%	20%	6%	29%
Develop AI strategy recommendations	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	6%	14%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%

* For each work role, n is the number of people who indicated they had input on new hires for the work role stated in the column heading.

^ Each percentage represents the percent of people with hiring input on the specific work role who indicated that the specific AI-based skill is expected for new hires in that work role.

Table 3*Type of Work for Which Respondents Report Using AI*

Use of AI	n	%
AI-assisted communications (transcribing notes, writing, editing, or summarizing)	108	78
AI-powered research (finding, analyzing, or synthesizing)	96	69
Generating ideas	82	59
Generating planning or report documents	63	45
Creating or editing images	53	38
Quantitative data analytics (interpreting or generating insights)	43	31
Textual data analytics (interpreting or generating insights)	31	22
Interacting or transacting with customers, patients, or clients (chatbots, virtual assistants, or other support)	23	17
AI-assisted coding (write, review, or debug)	20	14
Workflow automation (automate repetitive tasks or processes)	20	14
I do not use AI in my work	13	9
Creating or editing videos	11	8
Other (please specify)	5	4
Manufacturing (setting up, operating, or monitoring equipment)	4	3

Note. *N* = 139.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

While specific AI-based expectations in marketing and sales careers differ from expectations in accounting, finance, IT and other career fields, there are foundational AI expectations common across functional roles. This may not be entirely surprising, yet it reinforces the value of working across disciplines to ensure all students are properly prepared with foundational AI knowledge and skills.

These results also reinforce the importance for marketing educators to design dynamic and responsive curricula that incorporates AI skill building (Schlegelmich & Mills, 2025; Barger et al., 2025). Trying to deter marketing students from using AI appears to be detrimental to preparing them for career success. Rather, the data indicates that marketing educators should pursue AI skill building competencies (Torkestani, Dose, & Mansouri, 2025; Barger et al., 2025) and purposefully integrate AI in the classroom (Richter et al., 2025). There are many published articles on how this can be done, including work by Raska and colleagues (2026) which details a method for integrating AI-aided insights for personalized and scalable approaches to enhancing mentoring in marketing education.

Another implication from this research is that cross-functional commonalities and role-specific expectations of AI use and skills exist in organizations. If graduates are not sufficiently prepared to connect their critical thinking skills and intelligence with opportunities AI creates in their fields of work, their value to a company that is already

investing in AI is diminished. Without a baseline level of AI expertise and function-specific AI skills, graduates will be unprepared.

Educators must develop effective pedagogy to prepare students for the dynamically changing workforce. For example, Shahper and colleagues (2025) utilized a social constructive approach to incorporating AI with a digital marketing course, partnering with a company, and students creating an AI-driven product campaign. Similarly, Barger and colleagues (2025) present a blueprint for aligning marketing education with industry, including AI-based pedagogies. These examples are productive ways to apply the results presented in this research.

The current research provides data from Midwestern companies on what industry expects, at a minimum, regarding AI skills in marketing, sales, and other areas. Educators in the Midwest and other regions can use this research to assess gaps that may exist in curriculum. Furthermore, others can gather data from their stakeholders to identify potential regional differences.

Limitations of this study include the use of a convenience sample, the relatively small sample size, and the overall survey response rate. This requires caution when applying these results beyond this sample. However, the general findings can still be meaningful and valuable contributions to the overall body of work seeking to ensure marketing and business curriculum remains current and effective in preparing graduates for success.

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CONFIDENT YET UNDERPREPARED: THE CASE FOR AI LITERACY IN BUSINESS AND MARKETING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence has impacted the workplace, and business schools have begun adopting it; however, there is no consensus on how to teach it systematically. In particular, there is no systematic, program-wide approach to teaching AI literacy in business education. In this study, we analyze the perceptions and experiences of 218 participants divided into four groups: students, alumni, employers, and faculty. A paradox emerged: all groups report high confidence in AI, but employers do not perceive students as students do, and all four groups identify the same gaps in AI business education. The proposed topics based on the identified gaps are (1) prompt engineering; (2) responsible use and overreliance awareness; (3) output verification and citation; (4) ethics, bias, and privacy; (5) a real-world tool stack beyond ChatGPT; and (6) future-of-work implications, which can serve as a foundation for an AI business literacy course.

INTRODUCTION

A recent AACSB study on AI adoption in business education notes that it is occurring across all types of universities. However, institutions with a more teaching or professionally oriented focus may be able to make the required changes more quickly. Nevertheless, the report concludes that there is no single universal formula for adopting AI in business education (Means, 2026). In a previous AACSB report, it was emphasized that business schools are actively adopting GenAI; however, this adoption is not yet uniform. Similarities in the adoption are foundational AI knowledge, ethics, policy, training, and classroom applications. The report suggests that attention is more on governance and implementation than on developing AI competencies (AACSB, 2025).

According to National Association of Colleges and Employers *Job Outlook 2026 Spring Update*, employers continue to report a 5.6% increase in hiring for 2026. AI is not necessarily contracting the job market; rather, it is transforming entry-level positions, especially in terms of the AI competencies required. The report indicates that 35% of entry-level positions require AI skills, and that 57.8% of employers assign AI-related responsibilities to interns. The skills employers demand include identifying and selecting the appropriate AI tool for the job, developing effective prompts, analyzing and reviewing AI outputs, and using AI tools to increase productivity. Artificial intelligence has come to stay and is changing the way we work, teach, and learn. For this reason, business programs must adapt to this new reality in order to educate future professionals with the appropriate skills, especially those related to artificial intelligence. In this study, we sought a 360-degree perspective on this ongoing phenomenon by asking students, alumni, faculty, and employers about their perceptions and experiences with AI. We

asked them how confident they felt in using AI properly and ethically, and all four groups reported high levels of confidence. However, when we asked them what they felt should be taught that is not currently being taught in business schools, they identified several gaps in AI literacy. Thus, a paradox emerges: stakeholders report high confidence in their AI skills, while also recognizing several areas that should be covered but are not currently addressed in business schools. Therefore, our main research question is: How do key stakeholders in a business program perceive their AI readiness, and what competency gaps do their responses reveal for the design of an AI literacy curriculum in business education?

BACKGROUND

Today, AI has become a core competency for everyone, as relevant as reading, writing, numerical, and digital skills (Ng et al., 2021). Long and Magerko (2020) define AI literacy as a “set of competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies; communicate and collaborate effectively with AI; and use AI as a tool online, at home, and in the workplace” (p. 2). Ng et al. (2021) suggest that AI literacy should be managed as a fundamental skill in education, integrated across four domains: knowing and understanding, usability and application, creation and evaluation, and ethical use. Educators should be knowledgeable in AI literacy to overcome educational challenges (Ng et al., 2021).

Lim et al. (2023) suggest that AI can be a transformative technology that educators need to adopt and discuss openly with students, including its risks, benefits, and ethical use. Business education should adopt AI in its teaching, especially ChatGPT; this means that faculty need to learn as well and adapt their teaching to this new reality to equip students with the skills the market demands (Ratten & Jones, 2023). Adopting AI can improve and reshape marketing education, especially through tools like ChatGPT, thereby enhancing students' learning (Guha et al., 2024).

However, there is no agreement on how AI should be implemented in higher education, but business education may have an advantage because constant innovation in the business world is translated into the classroom, making business a strong adopter of this new technology (Huo & Siau, 2024).

Huo and Siau (2024) state that a pressing issue in business education in the age of AI is defining what to teach and how, suggesting that business schools update their educational programs, teaching methods, and assessment practices, while also teaching human skills that AI cannot replicate, such as soft skills. Students are already using AI, and educators should teach students how to use it critically (Gonsalves, 2024). Most studies focus on one or two stakeholders rather than a 360-degree view. This study addresses that gap by analyzing four stakeholder groups simultaneously: students, alumni, faculty, and employers.

METHODOLOGY

The research design is a mixed-methods, cross-sectional online survey administered via the Qualtrics platform. The data collection period was from October to November 2025. A total of 218 completed surveys were collected: IB students (Fall 2025; $n = 152$), IB alumni ($n = 38$), employers who have hired IB graduates ($n = 14$), and IB faculty ($n = 14$). The instrument included Likert-scale items (1–5), multiple-choice questions,

and open-ended questions by group. Therefore, quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, and qualitative analysis was conducted through thematic coding of open-ended responses, verified by the researchers. Because the sample comes from a single program at a single university, the findings are analytically rather than statistically generalizable, as their value lies in identifying a transferable curricular problem. In particular, the employer and faculty subgroups (n=14 each) are small, and their findings should be interpreted with caution.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

When the four participant groups were asked about their confidence in using AI, all reported high levels of confidence. For example, students: 74% reported positive confidence in responsible AI use; alumni: 73% positive; employers: 83% positive; and faculty: 92% positive, the most confident group. When asked how competent they felt in using AI, students reported being “competent” to use AI at work (82%). However, employers perceived program graduates as “competent” at only 58%, and only 1 of 14 employers selected “extremely competent.” When students were asked whether they would find a job because of their AI knowledge, 43% responded “neither,” the most frequent response (not “positive”). Faculty rated their students as “average” prepared (67%), and 72% of alumni reported having no AI portfolio item to show employers. There is a significant gap between how students perceive themselves and how employers evaluate them. When the four groups were asked what should be taught that is not currently being taught, their responses converged. This suggests that reported confidence does not necessarily reflect perceived preparedness as evaluated by employers, but rather may indicate limited awareness of existing competency gaps. Themes that emerged across all four groups were the following: (1) prompting skills (2) responsible use (3) verification and citation of outputs (4) ethics, bias, and privacy (5) tools beyond ChatGPT. One faculty member commented: “Don’t leave it to chance or the goodwill of each faculty member—it needs to be incorporated as a hard learning objective/skill in all courses.” The convergence of the four groups around the same unmet needs—without coordination among them—is evidence of a systemic curricular gap, not an individual one. Stakeholders, without realizing it, identified the foundational areas of an AI business literacy course that the program currently lacks.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

Business and marketing programs need to move from exposure to specific AI tools to a more structured AI literacy, with clear learning outcomes at the college level. Also, students' self-reported confidence cannot be taken as a proxy for preparedness, and there is a perception gap between employers and students. This is relevant for marketing education, where AI is reshaping core functions such as customer analytics, content creation, and sales communication (Grewal et al., 2025). It is not the goal of the present study to propose a full syllabus. Instead building on the five themes identified by stakeholders, and incorporating future-of-work implications raised by alumni and faculty, this study proposes six foundational areas that can serve as a basis for curriculum design: (1) prompt engineering; (2) responsible use and overreliance awareness; (3) output verification and citation; (4) ethics, bias, and privacy; (5) a real-world tool stack beyond ChatGPT; (6) future-of-work implications, including how AI is

reshaping entry-level roles, automating routine tasks, and requiring graduates to continuously adapt their skillsets. Future research could focus on co-creating this AI-in-business and marketing course with the four stakeholder groups, implementing it, and measuring post-implementation outcomes to assess whether the gap between students' self-perceptions and employers' expectations narrows.

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IMPROVISATION AS PEDAGOGY: CREATIVITY AND PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

Creativity and oral communication are identified as core competencies for marketing graduates, yet marketing educators continue to face challenges in developing pedagogical approaches that cultivate creativity and address public speaking anxiety. This study examines improvisational training as an experiential pedagogical intervention in undergraduate marketing courses. Using a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test design, changes in students' self-rated creativity and public speaking anxiety were assessed before and after an in-class workshop series led by faculty with improvisational experience. Although overall composite scores did not significantly improve, item-level and subgroup analyses revealed creative recalibration among students with high baseline creativity. Public speaking anxiety remained stable across the intervention, suggesting that improvisation does not heighten communication apprehension and may serve as an anxiety buffer. These findings position improvisation as a psychologically safe pedagogy that supports adaptive communication, creative self-assessment, and tolerance for uncertainty in marketing education.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators face growing pressure to develop graduates who possess not only technical knowledge but also the creative and communication competencies that employers consistently prioritize. Industry feedback emphasizes creativity, adaptability, and oral communication as critical determinants of early career success (Finch et al., 2012; Schlee & Harich, 2014; Martz et al., 2017). Yet public speaking anxiety remains one of the most reported fears among college students, often undermining performance in presentations, client interactions, interviews, and other high-visibility professional settings (Ireland, 2020). These two challenges are rarely addressed simultaneously in the marketing classroom. Traditional presentation assignments may improve technical delivery but can inadvertently reinforce anxiety and the fear of failure, while creativity-focused work often neglects the psychological barriers that inhibit risk-taking in the first place. This paper argues that improvisation, a structured form of spontaneous collaboration grounded in presence and mutual acceptance, serves as a pedagogical bridge between these two challenges. By emphasizing adaptability and tolerance for uncertainty, improvisation aligns closely with the realities of marketing practice while creating a psychologically safe environment for iterative skill development. Marketing contexts such as client pitches, team brainstorming, and stakeholder interactions demand precisely the spontaneous, adaptive communication that improvisational training develops.

BACKGROUND

Creativity is broadly recognized as central to effective marketing decision-making, innovation, and problem-solving, yet scholars consistently note a gap between its importance in practice and how systematically it is cultivated in curricula (Schlee & Harich, 2014; Martz et al., 2017). The rise of generative artificial intelligence has introduced additional urgency to this concern. Research suggests that while AI can support creative tasks, it may simultaneously undermine students' creative self-efficacy (Habib et al., 2024), a tension illustrated by the cultural backlash surrounding Apple's 2024 "Crush!" advertisement, which many interpreted as a symbol of technology displacing rather than augmenting human creativity (Nudd, 2024).

Oral communication is equally recognized as a core graduate competency (DiSalvo et al., 1976; Young & Murphy, 2003), yet instructional approaches emphasize polish and evaluation over iterative confidence-building. Students are routinely asked to perform high-stakes presentations with limited opportunity to experiment, fail safely, or recover, conditions that exacerbate rather than alleviate anxiety. Interventions that explicitly target self-efficacy, uncertainty tolerance, and adaptability are therefore likely to be more effective than traditional speech training alone (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016).

Improvisation is grounded in principles such as "Yes, and," active listening, and unconditional acceptance, which encourage participants to build on one another's contributions without fear of immediate judgment. In educational contexts, improvisation has been shown to foster creative thinking, collaboration, and comfort with ambiguity. It normalizes mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures, thereby reducing evaluative threat and strengthening self-efficacy over time. By engaging students in short, embodied, low-stakes exercises, instructors can decouple speaking from formal performance and reconnect it to authentic communication and interpersonal presence.

Importantly, the value of improvisation as a pedagogical tool extends well beyond marketing education. Perrmann-Graham et al. (2022) found that improvisation exercises served as a team-building mechanism in management education, fostering psychological safety and trust within student groups, outcomes directly relevant to collaborative marketing work. In music education, Wang and Kim (2025) found that improvisation-based pedagogy reduced performance anxiety among undergraduate music majors, suggesting that the anxiety-buffering effects of improvisation may generalize across performance-oriented disciplines. More broadly, Jouin et al. (2026) conducted a mini-review of applied improvisation across university settings and found consistent evidence that improvisation training supports adaptive communication and tolerance for uncertainty regardless of discipline. Taken together, these cross-disciplinary findings strengthen the rationale for importing improvisational pedagogy into marketing classrooms where psychological safety, team collaboration, and spontaneous communication are all in demand.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design conducted within undergraduate marketing courses. Improvisation sessions were integrated as in-

class workshops led by faculty with improvisational training and experience. Exercises drew on established improv principles including “Yes, and” exchanges, collaborative storytelling, and active listening activities designed to reduce evaluative threat and build communicative confidence. A total of 36 students completed the pre-intervention survey; 33 completed both surveys and constitute the matched sample used for paired analyses. Public speaking anxiety and creativity were assessed using Likert-type items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with individual items aggregated into composite mean scores. Paired-samples t-tests evaluated changes across measurement occasions, consistent with established practices in marketing education research employing pretest-posttest designs (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016; Tan & Ong, 2019). Two research questions guided the study: whether improvisation increases self-rated creativity (RQ1) and whether it reduces public speaking anxiety (RQ2), with corresponding hypotheses predicting significant post-intervention improvement on both dimensions.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Public speaking anxiety showed no statistically significant change from pre-intervention ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.32$) to post-intervention ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.35$), $t(32) = -0.19$, $p = .85$ (Tables 1 and 2). H2 was not supported; however, the absence of increased anxiety is itself noteworthy. Given that improvisation demands spontaneous, unscripted communication, one might reasonably expect it to heighten apprehension among students unaccustomed to such conditions. Stability in anxiety scores instead suggests the intervention functioned as an anxiety buffer, normalizing uncertainty and reducing the perceived threat of oral communication, even if measurable reductions were not observed. This finding is consistent with self-efficacy theory, which posits that repeated low-stakes exposure to feared stimuli gradually weakens avoidance responses over time.

Similarly, composite creativity scores did not change significantly from pre-intervention ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.54$) to post-intervention ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.61$), $t(32) = 1.58$, $p = .12$ (Table 3), leaving H1 unsupported at the composite level. Ceiling effects may have constrained observable gains given the already-high baseline scores. Item-level analyses, however, revealed meaningful decreases on two confidence-based creativity items ($p = .002$ and $p = .01$) and a third approaching significance ($p = .059$), indicating that change was localized to specific dimensions rather than uniformly distributed across the construct (Table 4). Subgroup analyses showed greater perceptual movement among students with higher baseline creativity ($p = .10$) compared to those with lower baselines ($p = .78$) (Table 5).

These patterns suggest that improvisation prompts a recalibration of creative self-perceptions, particularly among students who entered the course already viewing themselves as highly creative. Rather than signaling a decline in creative capability, these shifts likely reflect a transition from trait-based to process-based understandings of creativity. From a self-efficacy perspective, this recalibration represents deeper learning, as students develop greater awareness of the effort, uncertainty, and collaboration inherent in genuine creative work.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics for Public Speaking Anxiety*

Measure	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Intervention	33	2.93	0.32	2.26	3.59
Post-Intervention	33	2.94	0.35	2.26	3.62

Note. Higher scores indicate greater anxiety.

Table 2*Paired-Samples t-Test for Public Speaking Anxiety*

Measure	Mean difference	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Public Speaking Anxiety	-0.01	-0.19 (32)	0.851	< .10

Note. Mean difference = Post minus Pre.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics for Creativity Composite Scores*

Measure	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Creativity Pre	33	3.93	0.54	2.46	4.85
Creativity Post	33	3.81	0.61	2.46	4.92

Note. Higher scores indicate stronger perceived creativity.

Table 4*Item-Level Creativity Changes*

Item	Pre mean	Post mean	t	p
Item 2	4.24	3.7	3.46	0.002
Item 5	4.23	3.92	2.73	0.01
Item 9	4.03	3.76	1.96	0.059

Note. Items reflect confidence-based perceptions of creativity.

Table 5*Creativity Scores by Baseline Creativity Level*

Group	N	Pre mean	Post mean	t	p
High Baseline Creativity	17	4.35	4.18	1.74	0.1
Low Baseline Creativity	15	3.52	3.49	0.29	0.776

Note. Groups defined by median split of pre-intervention scores.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

This study positions improvisation as a dual-purpose pedagogical tool capable of simultaneously addressing creativity development and communication apprehension within the marketing curriculum. For theory, the findings support a process-oriented view of creative self-efficacy in which meaningful learning can manifest as recalibration rather than simple linear gain. For practice, the intervention demonstrates that improvisation can be integrated into existing courses without redesign, making it a low-risk, scalable teaching option. The results also respond to broader calls for human-centered pedagogy at a moment when generative AI raises questions about students' creative confidence and originality. The cross-disciplinary evidence from management, music, and broader university settings (Perrmann-Graham et al., 2022; Wang & Kim, 2025; Jouin et al., 2026) further suggests that improvisation may represent a transferable pedagogical framework applicable well beyond marketing education. Future research should employ control group designs, longer intervention windows, and qualitative methods to capture how students narrate and internalize changes in their creative self-concept over time. Replication across diverse institutions and student populations would strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

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MANAGING GLOBAL PRODUCT-HARM CRISES ACROSS CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Product-harm crises create difficult choices for global firms because consumers may interpret corporate responsibility and response strategies differently across national markets. This developmental study examines how U.S. and Chinese consumers evaluate apology, justification, and denial following mild or severe product-harm crises. Using a 2 × 2 × 3 design, 233 respondents evaluated a fictitious multinational electronics firm before and after a crisis and after exposure to one corporate response. Preliminary findings indicate that apology produces more favorable post-response company evaluations and is viewed as more appropriate than denial or justification. Crisis severity appears to shape immediate reactions, while current analyses provide limited evidence that national market context changes the relative advantage of apology. The study provides an initial basis for developing a more complete cross-cultural model of product-harm crisis response.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations operating across national markets must manage product-harm crises in environments where expectations about responsibility, accountability, and corporate communication may differ. For marketing managers, these events are more than public relations problems. Product failures can affect consumer attitudes, perceived responsibility, purchase consideration, and the broader relationship between consumers and the brand. When harm occurs, consumers evaluate both the event and the firm's response to it.

This developmental study examines how consumers in the United States and China evaluate corporate crisis response strategies following a product-harm event. The study compares apology, justification, and denial under mild and severe crisis conditions. The current proceedings paper reports preliminary findings from the initial experimental analysis and identifies the cultural and measurement questions that will guide the next stage of the project.

BACKGROUND

Crisis communication research distinguishes between defensive and accommodative response strategies (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Denial distances the organization from responsibility. Justification acknowledges the event but attempts to reduce perceived responsibility or severity. Apology is more accommodative because it communicates regret and accepts responsibility. Image restoration theory

similarly proposes that organizations use communication to repair damaged reputation following negative events (Benoit, 1995).

Attribution theory suggests that consumers seek explanations for product failures and assign responsibility and blame (Folkes, 1984). More severe events may heighten expectations for accountability. National market context may further shape these evaluations because consumers in different markets may interpret responsibility and apology differently (Hofstede, 2001). In the present developmental analysis, culture is operationalized primarily as national market context through comparison of U.S. and Chinese respondents. Hofstede's Values Survey Module was collected as part of the broader project (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013), but the present paper does not interpret those measures as individual-level cultural scores. Their appropriate role will be evaluated in the next stage of the research.

H1: Consumers exposed to an apology response will report more favorable company evaluations than consumers exposed to denial or justification.

H2: Consumers exposed to an apology response will perceive the company's statement as more appropriate than consumers exposed to denial or justification.

H3: Consumers exposed to a severe crisis will report less favorable evaluations than consumers exposed to a mild crisis.

H4: The effect of corporate response strategy on consumer evaluations will differ between U.S. and Chinese respondents.

METHODOLOGY

The current dataset contains 233 usable responses, including 103 respondents from the United States and 130 from China. The study used a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ design involving national market context, crisis severity, and corporate response strategy. Crisis severity was manipulated as mild or severe, and response strategy was manipulated as apology, justification, or denial. Each respondent evaluated one combination of crisis severity and response strategy.

Respondents first read a description of Star Electronics, a fictitious multinational consumer electronics firm, and evaluated the company on four items: purchase consideration, perceived innovation, perceived social responsibility, and overall positive attitude. Respondents then read either a mild or severe product-failure scenario involving a television set and a house fire and evaluated the company again. Finally, respondents read an apology, justification, or denial response, completed the company-evaluation items a third time, and rated the appropriateness of the firm's statement.

The combined company-evaluation measure is used in the present preliminary analysis. Internal consistency, dimensionality, recruitment procedures, cell-level sample sizes, and expanded demographic reporting will be addressed in the next-stage manuscript so that the measurement and sampling decisions can be evaluated more fully.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary analyses indicate that the severity manipulation operated in the intended direction, with the severe scenario producing stronger perceptions of crisis severity than the mild scenario. The clearest current finding concerns response strategy. Apology produced more favorable post-response company evaluations than denial or justification, providing preliminary support for H1. Apology was also viewed as the most appropriate response, providing preliminary support for H2.

H3 receives partial preliminary support. Severe crises produced less favorable evaluations in initial models, but this effect was reduced after accounting for respondents' evaluations immediately after the crisis. This pattern suggests that severity may exert much of its influence when consumers first process the event.

The current analysis does not support H4. National market context did not substantially change the relative advantage of apology across the two samples. Country differences did emerge in perceived response appropriateness, with U.S. respondents generally evaluating the statements more favorably. Because the study is developmental and cell sizes are relatively small, the absence of a strong interaction should not be interpreted as evidence that U.S. and Chinese consumers respond identically. The current analysis also does not draw a substantive conclusion about whether justification differs from denial; that pairwise comparison remains part of the expanded analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

The preliminary results position crisis response as an important part of brand and consumer relationship management. Across the two national samples, apology appears to offer stronger consumer-facing recovery potential than denial or justification. This finding suggests that efforts to limit responsibility through defensive communication may conflict with consumers' expectations for accountability when product harm occurs.

Developmental Status and Next Steps

The study remains developmental. Next-stage analysis will examine measurement reliability and dimensionality, cell-level results and effect sizes, the response-strategy-by-country interaction, the denial-versus-justification contrast, and the appropriate use of the cultural-value measures collected in the study. Future work will also consider trust, forgiveness, word-of-mouth, social sharing, and purchase intention. These analyses will clarify when apology is broadly effective and when culturally specific responses may be necessary.

Table 1

Summary of Preliminary Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Preliminary result
H1	Preliminary support: apology outperformed denial and justification on company evaluation.
H2	Preliminary support: apology was rated most appropriate.
H3	Partial preliminary support: severity effect weakened after post-crisis evaluation was considered.
H4	Not supported in current analysis: no substantial Country × Response moderation.

Note. Directional findings are preliminary. Cell sizes, test statistics, p values, and effect sizes will be incorporated in the next-stage analysis.

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDENT CONSULTANCY MODEL FOR MARKETING CAREER READINESS

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary marketing landscape demands graduates who possess cross-functional agility, strategic adaptability, and real-world problem-solving capabilities. But undergraduate education often develops these competencies in disciplinary silos, producing a critical gap between academic preparation and employer expectations. This paper presents the Indiana University Kelley + Media School (K+M) Collective, an interdisciplinary marketing consultancy embedded within BUS-M310: Brand Management Practicum. In its inaugural semester, 32 students from business and media disciplines collaborated on cross-functional teams serving four organizational clients. Assessment is conducted through a multi-source assessment matrix incorporating faculty rubrics, peer performance indicators, and executive client scorecards aligned with AACSB Assurance of Learning (AoL) standards. Preliminary findings from the inaugural Spring 2026 cohort indicate strong client satisfaction scores and, per student reflection feedback, growth in strategic confidence, adaptive leadership, and critical thinking. This model offers an adaptable framework for universities seeking to bridge the gap between academic theory and high-stakes market execution.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary marketing profession increasingly demands multi-functional agility, real-time strategic adaptation, and high-fidelity marketing expertise. But undergraduate business and media programs frequently operate within rigid departmental structures, limiting opportunities for students to develop these competencies collaboratively before entering the workforce. The result is a well-documented “critical thinking paradox”: a recent national survey of nearly 1,500 executives finds critical thinking, communication, and collaboration ranked above AI literacy in entry-level hiring priorities, with AI shifting entry-level work toward more complex responsibilities (Hanson, 2026).

Employers evaluating recent graduates consistently prioritize applied work experience, such as internships and project-based learning, over academic achievement indicators such as GPA. Candidates with strong credentials but no formal work experience are ranked least preferred (Hanson, 2026). National employer surveys corroborate this shift, citing internships as valuable experience and reporting growing use of skills-based hiring over credential screening (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2025). These converging pressures demand a fundamental rethinking of experiential marketing education at the undergraduate level.

BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

The IU K+M Collective was established through a cross-institutional collaboration between the Kelley School of Business and The Media School at Indiana University Bloomington. Operating under the curriculum designation BUS-M310: Brand Management Practicum, the faculty-led program functions as a structured, semester-long professional marketing and communications consultancy. Enrollment is selectively balanced between the two founding schools, ensuring each team integrates marketing and media students. The practicum provides theoretical grounding in marketing strategy, applied through structured assignments that drive critical thinking and practical application within each client's projects.

The K+M Collective's cross-school integration between business and media curricula distinguishes it from single-discipline agency and capstone models, pairing agency-style client delivery with structured, joint business-media instruction.

The program directly addresses limitations identified in prior experiential learning literature. Razzouk et al. (2003) documented the benefits of real-client projects while identifying two persistent barriers: the difficulty of sourcing authentic client engagements and assessing individual accountability within group work. Interdisciplinary, team-based structures—where students from different disciplines collaborate on authentic problems—measurably develop the critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving capabilities employers demand (Hart, 2019). The K+M Collective was architected to overcome both barriers through a formalized client portfolio and a multi-evaluator assessment infrastructure. The inaugural client portfolio spanned four organizations: Amplify Bloomington, United Way of Central Indiana, the Indiana University Maurer School of Law, and EdTechQuest, an educational technology start-up.

METHODOLOGY

The K+M Collective's pedagogical design centers on three interdependent structural innovations. First, a cross-disciplinary team architecture integrates marketing and media students onto client engagement teams, requiring cross-disciplinary fluency within a consulting model mirroring agency and corporate environments. Second, the program serves a live portfolio of active clients rather than hypothetical case studies, each with imperative business objectives. Student consultants earn course credit and are compensated for their client project work through client project fees. Students become part-time, temporary IU employees for the 15-week course consultancy duration.

Third, student learning is evaluated through a 360-degree, multi-evaluator assessment matrix aligned with AACSB Assurance of Learning (AoL) protocols, integrating three streams: (1) faculty rubrics measuring weekly milestone execution and theoretical application; (2) anonymized peer performance indicators tracking accountability, leadership, and operational contribution; and (3) executive client scorecards assessing deliverables' business impact, professional utility, and strategic depth. This multi-source framework addresses the assessment objectivity challenges inherent to group-based experiential learning (Razzouk et al., 2003). Five AoL themes—Strategic Consulting and Problem-Solving, Professional Communication and Storytelling, Teamwork and Accountability, Strategic Creativity, and Navigating

Ambiguity—were mapped to Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and documented with behavioral evidence across all four engagements. Appendix A summarizes this mapping and Appendix B provides an illustrative scorecard item, to support adoption elsewhere.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the inaugural Spring 2026 cohort of 32 student consultants serving four clients provide preliminary evidence for the K+M Collective's framework. On a seven-point client evaluation scale, all four engagements scored in the “above expectations” to “exceptional” range.

Crucially, downstream indicators provide additional evidence of effectiveness. All clients indicated they were “very likely” to continue their partnership with a future cohort, and all four have begun implementing student recommendations, with several exploring additional paid engagements. A survey of student participants yielded a mean likelihood-to-recommend of 9.8 on a 10-point scale.

Qualitative evidence from student reflection protocols reveals development consistent with experiential learning, where critical reflection mediates meaningful learning from authentic experiences (Morris, 2020). Students across all four engagements demonstrated the ability to diagnose structural misalignments, independently pivot strategic frameworks under real-world resource constraints, and deliver professional-caliber recommendations without predefined templates.

Representative reflections illustrate this concretely. One consultant noted: “The hardest problem I helped tackle was ensuring that our concept did not unintentionally exclude individuals or create barriers to participation -- keeping it true to what the client stands for.” A student described translating academic language into market-ready positioning: “The product risked being perceived as just another learning tool. I helped reframe positioning away from clinical jargon toward foundational skill-building like self-regulation and readiness to learn.”

These quantitative and qualitative outcomes provide evidence that the K+M Collective successfully supports undergraduate career readiness.

These results are preliminary: one cohort at a single institution, evidenced largely through self-report rather than validated pre/post measures or a comparison group. The engagement-to-engagement score spread was not tied to a formal explanatory analysis; isolating what drives higher client satisfaction across engagement types is a priority for future research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

The K+M Collective offers a replicable model for marketing educators seeking to operationalize experiential learning at scale (Shanahan et al., 2021). Its core design principles—cross-disciplinary team architecture, live client accountability, and multi-evaluator assessment—can be adapted across varying resource contexts, directly addressing documented employer demand for graduates who possess adaptive thinking and professional experience, not merely academic credentials (Hanson, 2026).

This model presents a high-value engagement channel: organizations receive substantive strategic deliverables at modest cost while contributing to a talent pipeline aligned with their sector's evolving needs. The program's success further demonstrates that undergraduate students, when placed in authentic, high-stakes professional

environments with rigorous structural support, are capable of delivering marketing strategy that meets or exceeds executive expectations.

Findings from the inaugural cohort inform three curricular refinements. First, final presentation modules will coach students to narrate their diagnostic process—not just display finished deliverables—demonstrating the strategy development journey clients most consistently requested. Second, sector-specific orientation will address specific stakeholder and market dynamics of the client organizational vertical environments. Third, client agreements with established project plans and milestone checkpoints will advance student workflow continuity. The assessment matrix itself, detailed in Appendices A and B, is packaged for direct adoption by other programs.

Institutionalized consulting practicum models represent a competitive differentiator for universities committed to workforce relevance. The K+M Collective's transferable assessment infrastructure, more than its specific client portfolio, is what other programs stand to gain most from adopting.

APPENDIX A

Table A1

SLO-to-AoL Theme Mapping

AoL Theme	Primary Evaluation Source	Illustrative Behavioral Evidence
Strategic Consulting and Problem-Solving	Faculty rubric; client scorecard	Diagnoses structural misalignments; proposes viable strategic options
Professional Communication and Storytelling	Client scorecard; faculty rubric	Delivers polished client-facing presentations and written deliverables
Teamwork and Accountability	Peer performance indicator	Meets team commitments; contributes reliably to shared deliverables
Strategic Creativity	Client scorecard; faculty rubric	Generates original, on-brief creative and strategic concepts
Navigating Ambiguity	Faculty rubric; peer performance indicator	Adapts approach independently under shifting client requirements

Note. AoL = Assurance of Learning.

APPENDIX B

Table B1

Illustrative Client Scorecard Item

Scorecard Item	Response Scale
The student team's final deliverable met or exceeded our organization's strategic needs.	1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)
The student team communicated professionally throughout the engagement.	1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)
We would partner with a future K+M Collective cohort.	1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely)

Note. Item wording is illustrative of the scorecard format; the full instrument includes additional items across business impact, professionalism, and partnership likelihood.

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HOW STUDENTS COMMUNICATE WITH GENERATIVE AI: POLITENESS, HABIT, AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

When students interact with generative AI, they bring their humanity with them. Many extend social conventions to these tools, utilizing politeness markers such as “please” and “thank you,” even as AI providers explicitly signal that such courtesy is unnecessary. Understanding how students communicate with these tools is increasingly relevant to marketing educators teaching AI literacy. This exploratory study uses two focus groups and four in-depth interviews (n = 9 college students) to examine how students describe their communication style with generative AI and what shapes their use or avoidance of polite language. We find that communication style is contingent rather than fixed, varying by task and platform, and that politeness is driven primarily by ingrained habit and personal identity, though some students believe polite phrasing yields better responses. We discuss implications for marketing educators designing AI-literacy instruction and outline a planned experimental research agenda.

INTRODUCTION

Some generative AI users submit polite prompts when using platforms such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity because the conversational nature of the interaction feels “human.” Users might type, “I was wondering if you could help me with planning my next vacation” or “Please help me find a recipe for homemade gluten-free bread” and follow it up with expressions of gratitude such as “Thank you, that’s perfect!” or “I appreciate that, thank you.” The insertion of politeness markers such as “please” and “thank you” signals courtesy and social consideration, much as it would in human-to-human communication. This behavior is consistent with the well-established tendency of people to apply social rules and norms to computers, even when they consciously understand they are not interacting with a person (Nass & Moon, 2000; Reeves & Nass, 1996).

College students are among the heaviest adopters of generative AI, using it for coursework, writing, and everyday tasks. For marketing educators, this raises a practical question that precedes any debate about academic integrity or assignment design: how do students actually communicate with these tools, and why? As AI literacy becomes a core competency in marketing curricula, educators benefit from understanding the communication habits, beliefs, and mental models students bring to the technology. This exploratory study addresses that descriptive question by examining how students describe their communication style with generative AI and the factors that shape their use or avoidance of polite language.

BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

AI providers generally note that politeness markers are unnecessary when interacting with generative AI and that more concise prompting is often preferable. This creates a tension between students' socially conditioned communication habits and the more utilitarian norms that AI platforms encourage. Research on communication accommodation theory suggests that people adapt their linguistic style based on repeated interactions with a given interlocutor or medium, and that these adaptations can persist across contexts (Giles, 2016). Frequent interactions with AI systems that normalize brevity and directness may therefore shape students' communication habits more broadly.

This tension is relevant to marketing education in two ways. First, effective prompting is itself a teachable skill; understanding how students currently prompt and the folk theories that guide them helps educators target instruction. Second, the communication habits students form with AI may not stay contained within the tool. If habitual AI use recalibrates how students express courtesy, the effects could extend to interpersonal and professional communication, which are central to marketing pedagogy. Examining how students currently communicate with generative AI is a first step toward preparing them to use these tools thoughtfully.

METHODOLOGY

In line with Strauss and Corbin (1990), a qualitative methodology was chosen to examine how users interact with generative AI platforms, as this area currently lacks a guiding theoretical framework. Two online focus groups ($n = 5$) and four in-depth interviews ($n = 4$) were conducted via Zoom with college students who use platforms such as ChatGPT, Claude, Google Gemini, and Perplexity at least once a week. We combine focus group and interview data because both employed the same semi-structured protocol, and we aim to surface the range of student communication patterns rather than to compare data-collection formats.

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 33 years old (median = 24). The sample comprised four women and five men and was ethnically diverse, including Hispanic or Latino (four), White or European American (two), and Asian or Asian American (two) participants, with one declining to report. Seven of the nine participants were graduate students, with one junior and one sophomore; all but one were employed at least part-time. Demographic characteristics are presented in Appendix A. Recordings of the focus groups and interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, yielding codes organized around how students describe their communication style and what drives their use or avoidance of politeness.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

First, the way students communicate with generative AI proved adaptive rather than uniform. Rather than settling on one register, participants tailored their phrasing to the situation: relaxed, conversational language for casual or everyday questions, and more disciplined, scaffolded prompts when the stakes were higher, such as coursework. The platform mattered too, with several students reporting that they spoke to one tool as they might a friend and to another in a more buttoned-up way. Experience also reshaped

their approach over time, though not in a single direction; some learned to supply richer detail and context, while others pared their prompts down as they discovered what worked.

Second, students' reasons for being polite were layered. For most, courtesy was not a calculated tactic, but something carried over from upbringing and a felt sense of who they are, sometimes accompanied by genuine appreciation when the tool was helpful. Running alongside this, however, was a folk theory held by several participants that civility pays off: they suspected that warm or considerate phrasing nudged the system toward friendlier, steadier, or more useful answers, and one student went so far as to treat politeness as a tactic for coaxing the model past its usual limits. Students on the opposite end skipped the niceties altogether, pointing to speed, the computational expense of extra words, and the simple fact that software has nothing to feel.

Third, the mental models students brought to these tools varied widely and loosely predicted how courteous they were. Some treated the assistant as nothing more than machinery, reaching for descriptions like a "word generator" or "ones and zeros," while others related to it as something closer to a person; a middle group perceived a personality but dismissed it as manufactured, a simulated warmth with nothing behind it. Those leaning toward the machine view tended to communicate curtly, whereas those who personified the tool were more likely to be polite. Tellingly, when we asked whether they would drop their courtesies if told phrasing made no difference to the output, most refused, explaining that how they speak to AI is simply an extension of who they are rather than a strategy they could switch off.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

For marketing educators, these findings carry several practical implications. Because students hold folk theories about how politeness affects AI output (some accurate, some not), AI-literacy instruction can productively address what actually shapes model behavior, helping students prompt more effectively and critically. Because communication style varies by task and platform, instruction framing prompting as a flexible, context-dependent skill will align with how students already work. And because many students treat their communication style as an extension of their personal identity, educators introducing efficiency-oriented prompting norms should recognize that these norms may be at odds with students' social instincts.

Our findings both support and extend the computers-as-social-actors (CASA) perspective (Nass & Moon, 2000): even as participants explicitly acknowledged interacting with a machine, they continued importing human social scripts into those exchanges. This pattern is consistent with the broader CASA literature documenting mindless social responses to computers, including the application of gender and ethnicity categories, politeness, and reciprocity. (Nass & Moon, 2000) Yet our context adds nuance, as students navigated that behavior with a degree of self-awareness that pure mindlessness accounts do not fully capture. By documenting the observed direction of transfer from human norms to AI, this exploratory study establishes descriptive groundwork for a planned experimental program to test whether sustained, efficiency-oriented machine communication can, over time, recalibrate politeness in human-to-human exchange. For marketing educators, that agenda speaks directly to preparing students to integrate generative AI into professional communication thoughtfully and effectively.

APPENDIX

Table A1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

ID#	Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Employment Status
1	Diego	20	Male	White	Employed full-time
2	Sofia	21	Female	Hispanic or Latino	Employed part-time
3	Ryan	19	Male	Prefer not to say	Employed part-time
4	Camila	26	Female	Hispanic or Latino	Employed part-time
5	Lucia	20	Female	Hispanic or Latino	Not currently employed
6	Anya	24	Female	White	Employed part-time
7	Mateo	27	Male	Hispanic or Latino	Employed full-time
8	Kenji	33	Male	Asian or Asian American	Employed full-time
9	Hiro	27	Male	Asian or Asian American	Employed full-time

Note: Participants 1–5 took part in focus groups; participants 6–9 completed individual in-depth interviews. Names are pseudonyms.

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DEVELOPING AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE FOR MARKETING STRATEGY: A SEVEN-STEP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators face increasing challenges in maintaining current instructional materials as artificial intelligence (AI) continues to reshape marketing practice. Open Educational Resources (OERs) offer a flexible alternative to traditional textbooks by allowing faculty to revise and update content more rapidly while reducing costs for students. This paper presents a seven-step framework used to develop and publish Marketing Strategy in the Age of AI, an OER created for an undergraduate marketing strategy capstone course. The framework includes establishing purpose and infrastructure, securing institutional support, gathering resources, identifying core concepts and learning outcomes, developing AI-assisted chapter drafts, conducting human review and integration, and publishing and implementing the resource. Key lessons learned include the importance of establishing learning outcomes before using AI, the continued need for extensive human editing, and the value of a consistent case study for content integration. Implications for marketing educators and future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education faculty face increasing pressure to keep course content current in disciplines shaped by rapid technological change. In marketing, AI has accelerated the pace of change, making it increasingly difficult for textbooks to remain current. As a result, instructors often struggle to find textbooks that adequately reflect contemporary marketing practice while still providing coverage of foundational concepts.

Open Educational Resources (OERs) offer one potential solution to this challenge. Unlike traditional textbooks, OERs can be updated, customized, and redistributed more easily, allowing faculty to respond more quickly to emerging developments in their disciplines (Hunter-Jones, 2012). OERs reduce textbook costs and allow educators to align content with learning outcomes and evolving industry needs.

While a growing body of research has examined the adoption and effectiveness of OERs, less attention has been devoted to the process of developing OERs in rapidly changing fields where content requires continual revision and adaptation. Educators interested in creating OERs often have limited guidance for developing resources in rapidly changing disciplines (Otto et al., 2021).

This paper presents a seven-step framework used to design, develop, and publish Marketing Strategy in the Age of AI, an OER created for an undergraduate marketing strategy capstone course. The project sought to preserve the foundational principles of

marketing strategy while incorporating contemporary applications of AI throughout the curriculum. By documenting the development process, implementation experience, and lessons learned, this paper provides practical guidance for educators seeking to create OERs in marketing and other rapidly evolving disciplines.

BACKGROUND

The adoption of OERs has increased substantially in higher education over the past decade. Research has identified several benefits associated with OER implementation, including reduced textbook costs, increased access to educational materials, and learning outcomes that are comparable to those achieved with traditional commercial textbooks (Fischer et al., 2015; Hilton, 2020). For many students, eliminating textbook expenses can reduce financial barriers and improve access to required course materials from the first day of class (Bliss et al., 2013).

Beyond cost savings, OERs provide marketing educators with the flexibility to customize and revise content to reflect both foundational marketing concepts and rapidly evolving technological developments (Hunter-Jones, 2012). This flexibility is especially important as AI continues to transform marketing practice.

The development of Marketing Strategy in the Age of AI emerged from these opportunities. The project sought to create a freely accessible textbook that integrated foundational marketing strategy concepts with contemporary AI applications while emphasizing the development of AI readiness among future marketing professionals.

METHODOLOGY

The development process resulted in a seven-step framework that may be useful for educators seeking to create OERs in rapidly evolving disciplines like marketing.

Step 1: Establish Purpose, Scope, and Infrastructure

The first step involved defining the purpose of the OER and identifying how it would differ from existing marketing strategy textbooks. The intended audience consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in a capstone marketing strategy course. Rather than treating AI as a separate topic, the goal was to integrate AI applications throughout the strategic marketing planning process.

During this stage, decisions were also made regarding publication infrastructure and long-term maintenance. Pressbooks, a free platform sponsored by the author's university, was selected as the publishing platform because it supports open access publishing, ease of revision, and integration with course materials.

Step 2: Secure Institutional Support

Developing an OER requires substantial time and resources. To support the project, a sabbatical proposal and an institutional OER grant application were developed and approved. These resources provided dedicated time for content development (a one-semester sabbatical) and monetary support for the project.

Step 3: Gather and Organize Resources

The third step focused on collecting and organizing content from a variety of sources. Resources included academic journal articles, practitioner-focused

publications, industry reports, existing marketing strategy textbooks, and publicly available educational materials.

Perplexity and Gemini Notebook (formerly NotebookLM) assisted with identifying, organizing, and synthesizing information from diverse sources. These tools accelerated the resource gathering process while helping identify emerging trends and examples related to AI in marketing.

Step 4: Identify Core Concepts and Learning Outcomes

Before drafting chapters, foundational marketing strategy concepts and frameworks were identified. A deliberate effort was made to preserve core marketing strategy principles while demonstrating how AI could enhance strategic decision-making.

Course learning outcomes were then developed using the revised Bloom's Taxonomy framework proposed by Gonsalves (2026). Establishing learning outcomes before content development ensured that each chapter remained aligned with desired student competencies and prevented the project from becoming overly focused on specific technologies or tools.

Step 5: Develop AI-Assisted Chapter Drafts

Once the conceptual framework was established, chapter development began. ChatGPT served as the primary AI writing assistant throughout the process. AI was used to generate outlines, brainstorm examples, draft content, suggest activities, and identify areas requiring additional explanation. The resulting eleven chapters emphasized how AI can support strategic marketing decisions rather than focusing solely on individual tools.

Step 6: Human Review, Editing, and Integration

The most time-intensive stage of the project involved reviewing, revising, and integrating content. Significant effort was devoted to fact-checking information, refining language, updating examples, verifying references, and ensuring consistency across chapters.

A recurring case study featuring BrewSmart Café was incorporated throughout the OER to create continuity and provide students with opportunities to apply concepts across multiple chapters. Considerable attention was also given to ensuring that themes, terminology, and examples remained consistent throughout the textbook.

Step 7: Publish and Implement

The final step involved publishing the OER on Pressbooks and integrating it into the Spring 2026 Marketing Strategy course. Each chapter included learning outcomes, key terms/glossary, discussion questions, multiple-choice quiz questions, references, an instructor teaching note, and BrewSmart Café case materials.

Implementation was accompanied by chapter-specific “Activity Assignments” designed to help students apply concepts and develop AI readiness through experiential learning activities.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The OER was successfully published and implemented during the Spring 2026 semester in an undergraduate Marketing Strategy capstone course. The implementation

phase focused on teaching and refining the content through classroom use and chapter-based Activity Assignments.

Several lessons emerged from the development process. First, AI significantly accelerated drafting but did not reduce the need for editing. While AI efficiently generated initial content, most development time was spent reviewing, revising, and integrating material. Human expertise remained essential for ensuring accuracy, quality, and pedagogical effectiveness.

Second, learning outcomes should be established before prompting AI. Clearly defined learning objectives ensured AI-generated material remained aligned with desired student competencies. This approach prevented the inclusion of content that was interesting but not instructionally relevant.

Third, the use of a consistent case study improved integration across chapters. The BrewSmart Café case created continuity throughout the textbook and helped students understand how strategic marketing decisions are interconnected.

The project demonstrated that AI functions best as a collaborative partner rather than an autonomous author. Faculty expertise remained essential for instructional design, content evaluation, and the creation of meaningful learning experiences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

For marketing educators, the seven-step framework offers a structured process for developing AI-enhanced OERs in rapidly evolving disciplines. For researchers, several opportunities for future investigation exist. First, future studies should examine the impact of AI-focused OERs on student learning outcomes, engagement, and course satisfaction. Second, comparative studies could examine differences between traditional marketing textbooks and AI-integrated OERs in preparing students for careers in AI-driven organizations.

As AI continues to reshape marketing practice, educators will require instructional resources that can evolve alongside technological change. OERs can provide accessible, adaptable, and timely educational materials that better prepare students for the future of marketing.

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“WILL IT SELL?” ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT IN PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement remains a continuing challenge in Principles of Marketing courses, particularly in large classes containing both business and non-business majors. This paper examines an active learning classroom exercise, “Will It Sell?”, designed to increase engagement, reinforce marketing concepts, and strengthen perceived relevance of course material. The exercise asks students to evaluate newly introduced products using environmental analysis, segmentation, targeting, and the marketing mix. Assessment data from current and former students suggest the activity increases enjoyment, participation, marketing understanding, and motivation to attend class. Findings indicate that students perceive the activity as an effective teaching tool that supports learning and stimulates interest in marketing. Implications for marketing educators and future pedagogical research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators continue to face pressure to create learning environments that are interactive, relevant, and capable of preparing students for increasingly dynamic business environments. This challenge may be particularly salient in Principles of Marketing courses, where classes often include both marketing and nonmarketing majors with varying levels of familiarity, motivation, and career interests. Marketing educators therefore face the dual challenge of increasing participation while helping students develop an integrated understanding of marketing concepts. Recent scholarship calls for more transformative and student-centered approaches to marketing education that move beyond passive content delivery toward applied and experiential learning (Kumar et al., 2025). Consistent with this perspective, active learning approaches have been shown to improve engagement, knowledge retention, and perceived relevance of course material (Freeman et al., 2014). This paper presents and evaluates “Will It Sell?,” an active learning exercise developed for Principles of Marketing. The study examines whether the activity enhances classroom engagement, perceived learning, and student interest in marketing from the student perspective.

BACKGROUND

Student engagement continues to be a central concern in Principles of Marketing courses, particularly because these classes often include nonmarketing majors with varying levels of familiarity and interest in marketing. Introductory marketing courses must not only communicate foundational concepts, but also stimulate participation, relevance, and enthusiasm for the discipline. Recent scholarship argues that marketing

education should move toward more transformative, student-centered approaches emphasizing application, interaction, and marketplace relevance (Kumar et al., 2025).

Research on active learning consistently supports instructional methods that require students to participate, analyze, and apply concepts rather than passively receive information. Active learning has been associated with stronger learning outcomes, increased participation, and greater student involvement (Freeman et al., 2014). Within business education, experiential and application-based learning designs have enhanced students' perceptions of engagement and instructional value (Jansson & Shelton, 2026).

Marketing education scholarship similarly reinforces participative learning environments. Karns (2005) found that marketing students viewed discussion-based activities as among the most effective contributors to learning, while Taylor et al. (2011) connected student engagement to positive learning experiences in marketing courses. Recent research also highlights empowerment and engagement in encouraging voluntary participation (Boaventura et al., 2026) and the value of connecting classroom learning to authentic business contexts (Turner-Henderson et al., 2025).

One challenge for marketing educators is helping students develop an integrated understanding of marketing decision making. Students may not naturally connect marketing to target markets, environmental analysis, or strategic integration of the marketing mix. Using current products and marketplace examples may help students visualize how marketing concepts operate in practice while encouraging discussion, critical thinking, and application.

The "Will It Sell?" exercise was developed to address these pedagogical challenges. By asking students to analyze contemporary products using environmental analysis, segmentation, target marketing, and marketing mix concepts, the activity creates repeated opportunities for experiential discussion and applied learning.

METHODOLOGY

"Will It Sell?" is conducted weekly at the beginning of an 80-minute Principles of Marketing class. Typical class size was about 200 students. A newly introduced consumer product is presented to students, frequently accompanied by physical products, advertising materials, the website and social media content. After the discussion, the students vote to indicate whether they think the product will sell or not. Product categories included packaged foods, beauty products, and consumer technologies.

Using a guided discussion framework, students analyze the product using core marketing concepts. Discussion topics include environmental forces, company strengths and weaknesses, market segmentation, target market selection, and the four elements of the marketing mix. The amount of time devoted to each topic depends upon the chapter being discussed that day. Students debate whether the product's marketing strategy is appropriately integrated and conclude by voting on whether the product is likely to succeed in the marketplace.

The activity was assessed using feedback from former and current students. Thirty-five former students provided anonymous online qualitative feedback approximately 18 months after course completion. Also, 198 current students completed an anonymous end-of-semester Qualtrics survey adapted from prior marketing education assessment work. Extra credit was provided for participation,

although responses were anonymous and participation was voluntary. IRB approval was obtained. Students evaluated the exercise using thirteen seven-point Likert-type items adapted from Vander Schee (2011) assessing enjoyment, engagement, learning, attendance motivation, and perceived instructional effectiveness. Open-ended responses were independently coded by two coders to identify recurring themes; disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Survey findings indicate strong positive student perceptions of the “Will It Sell?” exercise (Table 1). Students reported high agreement that the activity increased enjoyment, class interaction, engagement, understanding of marketing concepts, and interest in marketing. They also viewed the exercise as an effective use of class time, supported continuing it, and believed similar activities should be incorporated into additional courses.

Table 1

Perceptions of the “Will It Sell?” Exercise

Survey Item	Mean (N = 198)	SD
Enjoyed the time spent on Will It Sell	6.32	1.088
Helped me to better understand marketing	6.09	1.058
Helped me in remembering concepts	5.56	1.256
Raised my awareness of marketing as a consumer	6.21	0.975
Encouraged class interaction	6.34	0.978
Increased my engagement during class	6.04	1.174
Helped in making me more interested in marketing	6.06	1.167
Made me more likely to attend class	5.21	1.726
Made me look forward to coming to class	5.89	1.236
It’s an effective teaching tool	6.16	0.963
Will It Sell should be continued	6.25	1.006
More classes should use exercises such as Will It Sell	6.27	1.005
Will It Sell was a good use of time	6.05	1.123

Note: Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Additional analyses revealed no meaningful differences in perceptions based on gender, academic major status, expected course grade, or race/ethnicity, suggesting broad appeal across student subgroups. Many nonmarketing students indicated that the exercise increased their interest in taking additional marketing courses, while marketing majors reported that it reinforced enthusiasm for the discipline.

Qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results. Dominant themes included enjoyment, enhanced conceptual understanding, stronger classroom engagement, and increased motivation to attend class (Table 2). Students emphasized the value of applying marketing concepts to current products and real-world marketplace examples and described the exercise as interactive, engaging, and different from traditional lecture formats. Representative comments highlighted increased understanding (“helps me understand marketing concepts a lot easier”), engagement (“it made the class engaged and attentive”) and attendance motivation (“brings me to class”). Taken together, the results suggest that recurring product-based active learning

exercises may provide an effective mechanism for increasing engagement and perceived learning in introductory marketing education.

Table 2

Representative Student Comments on “Will It Sell?”

Themes	Representative Student Comment
Knowledge, engagement	“It’s extremely interactive and helps me understand marketing concepts a lot easier.”
Enjoyment, knowledge	“It is a good way to tie Marketing into real world stuff that is going on.”
Engagement	“It is a good way to involve the class more.”
Knowledge, attendance	“It really helps me to understand how marketing is used in the real world... Brings me to class.”
Knowledge, engagement	“It is interactive, requires us to think critically from a marketing standpoint.”
Engagement	“It really helped to get engaged with the professor and with each other.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

This study contributes to marketing pedagogy by illustrating how a relatively simple, adaptable classroom innovation can support active learning in Principles of Marketing. The findings reinforce broader educational theory suggesting that experiential, discussion-oriented learning environments enhance engagement and knowledge. The exercise can be adapted to large or small classes and to courses such as marketing management, product management, services marketing, and consumer behavior. It also provides a structured framework for integrating contemporary marketplace examples into classroom teaching.

Future research should extend assessment beyond self-reported perceptions to examine objective learning outcomes, longitudinal knowledge retention, attendance, participation, and whether the “Will It Sell?” exercise influences students’ interest in additional marketing coursework or the discipline itself.

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USING NOTEBOOK LM TO SUPPLEMENT AN INTRODUCTORY SELLING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the application of Google's NotebookLM as a generative AI supplement in an introductory Strategic Selling course. Higher education increasingly leverages AI to boost student engagement, but educators must choose between avoiding these tools and integrating them to build critical workplace skills. By choosing integration, this study addresses the need to improve students' exam performance and conceptual understanding, particularly regarding the steps of the sales process. Students create a comprehensive digital notebook by uploading Salesforce and HubSpot articles alongside other open-access resources. Using NotebookLM's capabilities, learners synthesize complex material, break down sales tasks, and generate tailored study guides, flashcards, and quizzes. Additionally, the platform supports practical assignments such as drafting buyer personas, value propositions, lead-qualification questions, and negotiation parameters. This approach enhances traditional course materials, provides essential hands-on AI experience, and offers a scalable framework for personalized learning in sales education

INTRODUCTION

While artificial intelligence (AI) has long maintained a presence in higher education, the sudden emergence of generative AI (genAI) platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude has fundamentally accelerated its adoption. In business education, where students must balance technical, conceptual, and human skills, genAI provides tailored learning environments that support the exploration of complex, real-world problems in controlled settings (Huo et al., 2024). Faced with this rapidly shifting landscape, the marketing faculty at Fort Hays State University intentionally chose to embrace these technologies, integrating them across the curriculum to enhance marketplace readiness and support the growing campus focus on Open Educational Resources (OER) and zero-cost materials. This paper examines a targeted application of this strategy: utilizing Google's NotebookLM platform as an interactive, zero-cost supplement in an introductory Strategic Selling course. By enabling students to synthesize open-access resources and generate custom study aids, this intervention directly addresses persistent gaps in student exam performance and concept retention surrounding the foundational steps of the sales process.

BACKGROUND

Although artificial intelligence (AI) technologies such as chatbots, predictive analytics, and adaptive learning systems have long been used in higher education, the emergence of generative AI (genAI) tools has fundamentally shifted the pedagogical landscape. In business education, where students must simultaneously develop

technical, conceptual, and human skills, genAI provides powerful opportunities for knowledge acquisition, intelligent co-ideation, and supportive text augmentation. As noted by Huo et al. (2024), genAI enhances educational adaptability by offering personalized learning environments tailored to individual student needs while letting learners safely navigate complex, real-world problems. When integrated alongside student-centered active learning strategies—including project-based learning, scaffolding, and flipped classrooms—these platforms significantly boost overall learner engagement. Crucially, the parallel rise of genAI adoption has coincided with an institutional push toward Open Educational Resources (OER) and zero-cost materials, creating a timely opportunity for faculty to leverage open-access text assets and specialized AI platforms to design interactive, customized study aids that address persistent student learning gaps.

METHODOLOGY

Once the core sales materials are uploaded, the platform utilizes scaffolding and text-augmentation techniques to break complex professional tasks down into manageable components. The student interaction with NotebookLM is divided into two operational tracks:

Track 1: Self-Directed Asset Generation

Students utilize the platform's native capabilities to transform the uploaded raw source text into structured study guides, interactive flashcards, conceptual mindmaps, and practice quizzes. This track directly targets the improvement of student exam scores and structural retention of the sales process.



Track 2: Applied Synthesizing

Students prompt the notebook to synthesize the open-access literature to complete practical, real-world sales deliverables. These structured assignments require students to actively apply the source text to generate the following critical components:

- **Buyer Personas:** Mapping specific customer profiles from market data.
- **Value Propositions:** Aligning prospect pain points with specific product benefits to practice proposal writing.
- **Lead Qualification Frameworks:** Developing strategic questions to audit prospect compatibility.
- **Negotiation Parameters:** Outlining terms and acceptable boundaries for simulated closing scenarios.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

The efficacy of the NotebookLM integration is assessed by comparing student exam performance on sales process concepts with historical baselines from semesters that used traditional reading methods. Additionally, the quality of the student-generated sales deliverables (proposals, qualification scripts, and negotiation sheets) is assessed to determine if the AI-augmented synthesis leads to a deeper, more practical execution of abstract business concepts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

The successful deployment of NotebookLM in the Strategic Selling course offers several critical insights for business educators navigating the generative AI era. First, it demonstrates that rather than banning AI to prevent academic dishonesty, faculty can intentionally design learning ecosystems where AI serves as a collaborative partner. By structuring assignments that require students to actively manipulate and synthesize information within an AI interface, educators can transition students from passive text consumers into active information managers. This approach directly addresses the dual mandate facing modern business programs: cultivating deep domain expertise while simultaneously building competitive, hands-on prompt engineering and AI literacy skills required in the modern marketplace.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING BRAND IMAGE IN UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Universities invest significant resources in promoting their academic programs, yet relatively little is known about how students and other stakeholders develop perceptions of a program's brand. This study explored the relationship among faculty promotion of program culture, understanding of the program's mission, perceptions of the program's meaning, confidence in graduates' employability, and willingness to recommend the program to others. Survey responses were collected from 638 stakeholders, including students, alumni, employers, and faculty members. The results indicate that stakeholders who demonstrated a clearer understanding of the program's mission were more likely to attribute stronger meaning to the program ($p = .136$, $p = .028$). Confidence in graduate employability emerged as the strongest predictor of recommendation intentions ($B = 1.096$, $p < .001$). The findings suggest that a program's reputation is shaped not only through marketing efforts but also through the day-to-day educational experiences that communicate its values, purpose, and relevance to the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions progressively compete on reputation, career outcomes, and perceived value. Branding has become a strategic mechanism for differentiation in a competitive marketplace (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Within business education, faculty members serve as primary representatives of institutional identity because they translate mission and values into classroom experiences (Melewar & Akel, 2005). Although branding research has concentrated heavily on institutional image, less attention has been given to how faculty-driven culture influences mission understanding, stakeholder meaning-making, employability confidence, and advocacy. This study examines these relationships within an undergraduate business program.

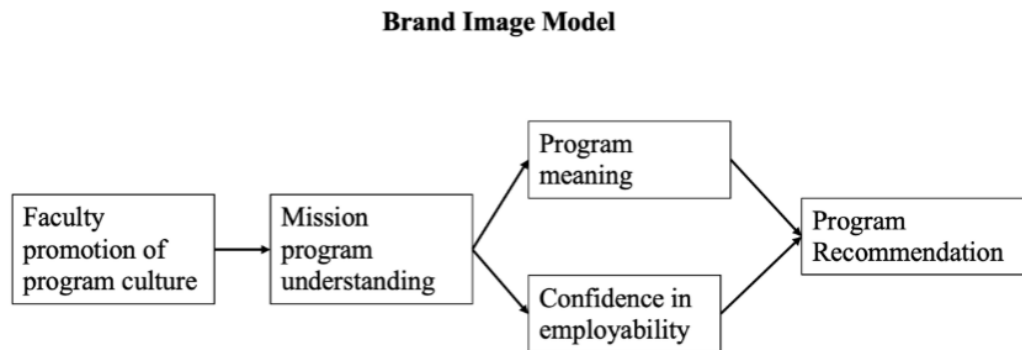
BACKGROUND

Brand identity reflects an institution's mission, culture, and values, whereas brand image reflects stakeholder perceptions (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016). The BIMIR framework posits that meaning serves as a bridge between identity and image, enabling stakeholders to interpret institutional signals and develop coherent perceptions of a program.

Faculty are key to this process because students encounter institutional values mainly through teaching and academic interactions (Ng & Forbes, 2009). When faculty consistently reinforce program culture and mission, stakeholders are more likely to develop a coherent understanding of what the program represents (Melewar & Akel, 2005).

Figure 1

Below shows the brand image model used for this study.



Employability has also emerged as an important dimension of higher education branding. Students increasingly evaluate programs according to their ability to prepare graduates for professional success (Harvey, 2001; Tomlinson, 2012). Research further suggests that stakeholders who perceive meaningful educational experiences and positive career outcomes are more likely to engage in recommendation behavior and advocacy (Pinar et al., 2014; Schlesinger et al., 2021).

Students and alumni reported relatively high levels of employability confidence and strong recommendation intentions. Employers reported particularly high levels of confidence in the employability of IB graduates, reinforcing the external value of the program in the labor market.

METHODOLOGY

A survey-based research design was used to examine perceptions of an undergraduate business program among students, alumni, employers, and faculty. The final sample included 638 respondents: approximately 401 students, 213 alumni, 17 employers, and 7 faculty members. Open-ended responses were used to assess perceptions of culture, mission, and meaning and were coded using a rubric-based approach that converted qualitative responses into ordinal measures. Closed-ended measures assessed employability confidence and recommendation intentions. Correlation and regression analyses were used to evaluate relationships among culture promotion, mission understanding, program meaning, employability confidence, and recommendation behavior.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings generally support the proposed branding model. Faculty promotion of program culture was positively associated with mission understanding, although this relationship did not reach conventional statistical significance in the stakeholder-controlled model. Nevertheless, respondents who perceived stronger faculty engagement tended to demonstrate a clearer understanding of the mission.

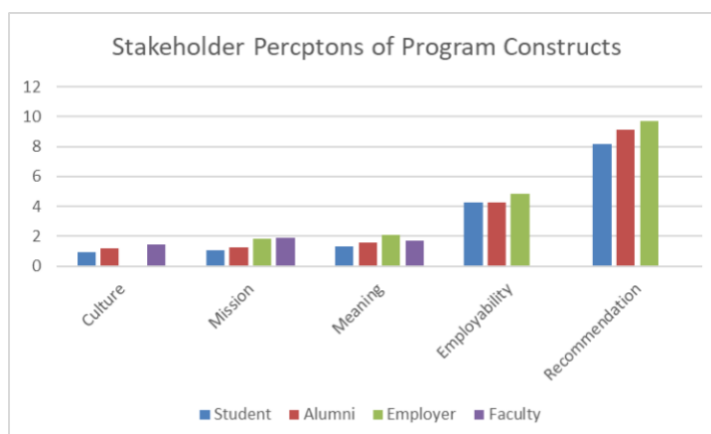
Mission understanding was positively associated with program meaning. A Spearman correlation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship ($p = .136$, $p = .028$). Stakeholders who articulated clearer interpretations of the program's mission were more likely to describe stronger and more coherent meanings associated with the program.

Employability confidence emerged as the strongest predictor of recommendation behavior ($B = 1.096$, $SE = 0.104$, $p < .001$). Program meaning also demonstrated a significant positive relationship with recommendation intention ($B = 0.255$, $SE = 0.127$, $p = .045$). These outcomes indicate that stakeholders seem more likely to recommend a program when they comprehend its purpose and believe graduates are prepared for professional success.

Beyond the statistical relationships, the findings reveal an important practical pattern across stakeholder groups. Respondents consistently associated with the value of the program not only with academic content but also with broader educational experience and perceived career preparation. Stakeholders who demonstrated a stronger understanding of the program's mission were generally more likely to articulate a clear sense of the program's purpose and distinctiveness. This suggests that mission communication may play a critical role in helping stakeholders connect educational experiences to long-term professional outcomes. As business schools continue to compete for students and employer recognition, ensuring that stakeholders understand both what the program does and why it matters may strengthen perceptions of value and differentiation.

Figure 2

Presents the average scores for the primary constructs across stakeholder groups.



These results indicate that program identity may develop through a sequence in which internal cultural signals inform mission understanding and program meaning, while external outcome expectations ultimately drive stakeholder endorsement and reputation-building behaviors. Therefore, our study shows employability perceptions function as a critical bridge between internal program identity and external program reputation.

Table 1:

Hypothesis Comparison Table

	Proposed Hypothesis Relationship	Statistical Test	Key Result	Outcome
H1	Faculty Culture Promotion → Mission Understanding	Regression	Positive relationship but not statistically significant	Not Supported
H2	Mission Understanding → Program Meaning	Spearman Correlation	$\rho = 0.136$, $p = .028$	Supported
H3	Program Meaning & Employability → Recommendation	Multiple Regression	Employability: $B = 1.096$, $p < .001$; Meaning: $B = 0.255$, $p = .045$	Supported

Overall, the results support a sequential branding process in which culture shapes mission understanding, mission understanding shapes meaning, and employability confidence drives advocacy and reputation-building behavior.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

The findings support the view that meaning functions as a mechanism linking internal identity and external image (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016). They also highlight employability as both an academic outcome and a branding mechanism influencing stakeholder advocacy (Harvey, 2001; Tomlinson, 2012).

For practitioners, the results point out the importance of faculty as brand ambassadors. Branding initiatives are unlikely to succeed if faculty do not consistently communicate and reinforce program values (Melewar & Akel, 2005). Business schools should therefore align branding strategies with classroom experiences and faculty engagement.

The findings also suggest that employability should be embedded within the instructional experience through internships, experiential learning, and industry partnerships. Stakeholders appear most willing to advocate for a program when they believe graduates have the skills and confidence necessary for professional success (Pinar et al., 2014).

The findings also have implications for assessment and accreditation efforts. Many business schools devote considerable attention to learning outcomes, employer engagement, and student success metrics. The present study suggests that institutions should also evaluate how effectively their mission and culture are understood by key stakeholder groups. Measuring mission understanding and program meaning may

provide additional insight into whether branding efforts are aligned with stakeholder experiences. Such measures can complement traditional performance indicators and help institutions identify opportunities to strengthen both reputation and stakeholder engagement.

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ARE MARKETING GRADUATES PREPARED TO SUCCEED IN AN AI-DRIVEN WORLD?

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming marketing practice and raising questions about whether marketing graduates are prepared to succeed in AI-driven workplaces. This study examined graduating marketing students' perceptions of their readiness for an AI-enhanced profession using a multidimensional framework that extends beyond technical AI skills. Forty-three marketing students enrolled in a capstone Marketing Strategy course completed a self-assessment measuring eight dimensions of AI readiness: AI literacy, ethical awareness, empathy, critical thinking, comfort with data, curiosity about emerging trends, human-in-the-loop decision making, and professional identity. Results revealed significant differences among the dimensions. Students reported the highest levels of readiness in empathy, ability to work human-in-the-loop, and professional identity, while curiosity about emerging trends and comfort with data received the lowest ratings. The findings suggest that marketing graduates perceive themselves as strongest in the human-centered competencies that remain essential in an AI-driven environment. Implications for marketing educators and future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming marketing practice, raising important questions about whether marketing graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to succeed in AI-enhanced workplaces. While many students are becoming comfortable using AI tools, employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate ethical judgment, critical thinking, empathy, data literacy, and the ability to work effectively alongside AI systems. In one study, 26 percent of employers said entry-level hires do not meet expectations, and 31 percent have already had to retrain new graduates due to AI skill gaps. The same study found that students often feel confident using AI, but schools are not keeping pace with workforce preparation; 56 percent of students feel highly confident, while only 14 percent believe their school is ahead in preparing them for AI use ("Are College Students Ready for AI Careers?" 2026).

The purpose of this study is to examine graduating marketing students' perceptions of their readiness to succeed in an AI-driven marketing profession. Unlike previous studies that have surveyed students across disciplines or at various stages of their academic careers, this study examines graduating marketing seniors immediately after completing a capstone course that integrates traditional marketing strategy frameworks with AI-enhanced approaches to decision-making.

The study assesses readiness across eight dimensions, including AI literacy, ethical awareness, empathy, critical thinking, data competence, curiosity about emerging trends, human-in-the-loop decision-making, and professional identity.

BACKGROUND

Several factors serve as motivation for this research. First, AI is rapidly and profoundly reshaping how marketers work. AI is increasingly used for content generation, customer insights, personalization, analytics, forecasting, and decision support. In doing so, marketing professionals are expected to work collaboratively with AI rather than simply use it as a tool.

However, employers have expressed concerns about workforce readiness. Students often report confidence using AI, but do not believe higher education is fully preparing them for AI-driven careers. Employers report AI-related skill gaps among new hires, and retraining of new hires was most common in marketing/advertising at 41 percent (“Are College Students Ready for AI Careers?” 2026).

In addition, higher education and employers are realizing that AI readiness involves more than prompt engineering or content generation. Future marketers need AI literacy, ethical reasoning, critical thinking, strategic judgment, communication skills, human-centered decision-making, and the ability to explain and defend decisions.

Finally, AI is changing not only workplace requirements but also how employers evaluate graduate preparedness. As generative AI makes traditional employability signals such as portfolios, presentations, and written assignments easier to produce, employers increasingly seek evidence that graduates can demonstrate judgment, critical thinking, problem framing, and decision-making rather than simply generate polished outputs (El Hajjar, 2026).

Given these factors, we believe that marketing graduates’ readiness for an AI-driven workplace should not be defined solely by their ability to use AI tools. Instead, AI readiness should be more broadly conceptualized and measured across the eight dimensions mentioned previously.

METHODOLOGY

Senior marketing students enrolled in a capstone Marketing Strategy course during the spring 2026 semester were surveyed regarding their perceptions of AI readiness. Students were nearing graduation and preparing to enter the workforce. A total of 43 students participated, with 19 taking the class online and 24 taking the class on-campus. Throughout the semester, the students immersed themselves in the core concepts and frameworks of marketing strategy (e.g., market segmentation and targeting, positioning, marketing research, pricing, promotion, product strategy, and distribution) and how those same ideas are being enhanced and strengthened by AI.

At the end of the semester, students completed the “AI, Ethics, and Empathy Self-Assessment.” The assessment contained eight competency dimensions as shown in Table 1.

Table 1*AI, Ethics, and Empathy Self-Assessment Competency Dimensions*

Dimension	Focus
AI Literacy	Understanding and using AI
Ethical Awareness	Fairness, privacy, responsibility
Empathy	Customer understanding
Critical Thinking	Evaluating AI outputs
Comfort with Data	Interpreting metrics
Curiosity About Emerging Trends	Lifelong learning
Human-in-the-Loop	Knowing when human judgment is needed
Professional Identity	Responsible marketing practice

Each area contained five items measured on a four-point scale from novice (“this is an area of weakness for me”) to mastery (“this is an area I’m confident in and excel in”). Students also responded to three open-ended questions, including their lowest-rated areas and reasons, their strongest areas and examples, and one area for future improvement. SPSS was used to analyze the survey data.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

For each of the eight dimensions, independent samples t-tests were run, comparing the mean scores of online and on-campus students. No significant difference was found between online and on-campus students for any of the eight dimensions. One-way repeated-measures ANOVAs were run, comparing the scores of all students on the eight dimensions, and significant differences were found ($F(7,294) = 24.286, p < .001$). Descriptive statistics for the eight dimensions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics*

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
AI Literacy	16.58	1.66523	43
Ethical Awareness	15.98	2.46391	43
Empathy	17.42	1.88013	43
Critical Thinking	15.93	2.12015	43
Comfort with Data	15.02	2.72107	43
Curiosity About Emerging Trends	14.28	3.09628	43
Ability to Work Human-in-the-Loop	17.58	2.45175	43
Professional Identity	17.63	2.08193	43

Note: Each dimension here is a composite score of 5 items scored on a scale from 1 to 4, so mean values range from 5 to 20 for each dimension.

Post hoc analysis revealed several significant differences between specific dimensions. Empathy ($M = 17.42$), Ability to Work Human-in-the-Loop ($M = 17.58$), and

Professional Identity ($M = 17.63$) were among the highest-rated dimensions and did not differ significantly from one another. Professional Identity was significantly higher than all dimensions except Empathy and Human-in-the-Loop. Empathy was significantly higher than Ethical Awareness, Critical Thinking, Comfort with Data, and Curiosity About Emerging Trends, while Human-in-the-Loop was significantly higher than Ethical Awareness, Comfort with Data, and Curiosity. Curiosity About Emerging Trends received the lowest mean rating ($M = 14.28$) and was significantly lower than all other dimensions except Comfort with Data ($M = 15.02$).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

The findings suggest that graduating marketing students perceive themselves as particularly prepared in the human-centered dimensions of AI readiness, including empathy, professional identity, and the ability to work effectively alongside AI systems. Conversely, students reported lower readiness regarding curiosity about emerging trends. This may indicate uncertainty regarding their ability to continuously adapt to future technological developments. Given the rapid pace of AI innovation, this finding suggests that marketing programs should focus not only on current AI applications but also on developing habits of lifelong learning and environmental scanning.

Interestingly, many educators worry that AI will reduce students' emphasis on empathy and human judgment. However, the findings suggest the opposite. The highest-rated dimensions were those that AI cannot easily replace, including empathy, ethical and professional judgment, and human oversight.

The findings also suggest that marketing curricula should continue emphasizing the human-centered competencies that distinguish effective marketers in an AI-driven environment, including empathy, professional judgment, and responsible decision-making. At the same time, lower self-assessments related to curiosity about emerging trends and comfort with data indicate opportunities to strengthen students' capacity for continuous learning and evidence-based decision making. Rather than focusing exclusively on AI tool proficiency, marketing educators should adopt a broader conception of AI readiness that integrates technical knowledge with ethical awareness, critical thinking, human oversight, and lifelong learning skills.

Finally, this study relies on self-reported perceptions rather than direct measures of competency. Students may overestimate or underestimate their actual readiness. Future research should compare student self-assessments with employer evaluations and objective performance measures.

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THE MARKETING EXPERIENCE PYRAMID: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR CAREER PREPARATION

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ABSTRACT

Marketing students face an increasingly competitive challenge to secure an entry-level job after graduation, especially when job descriptions request prior marketing experience. However, varied interpretations of marketing experience may lead students to seek experience inefficiently or not at all. This research uses signaling theory to conceptualize the Marketing Experience Pyramid—an organizing framework to illustrate the comparative employer signaling value of student marketing experiences. Levels of the Pyramid range from common demonstrations of marketing knowledge to rare demonstrations of marketing expertise. This work outlines the framework and eight research propositions, along with proposed operationalizations for student self-assessment, and implementation within courses and career development settings, informed by a successful pilot test and AI application.

INTRODUCTION

A primary motivation of marketing students in their choice of major is to secure employment after graduation (Atkin et al., 2022). External factors make this task continually challenging (e.g., labor conditions, competition with entry-level job seekers, AI-related market disruption, etc.) and recent statistics reveal that potentially 60% of marketing degree holders will be underemployed 5 years after graduation (Hanson et al., 2024).

In such conditions, students persist in career preparation by focusing on the controllable activities that they believe will increase their odds of post-graduation success. In part, success increases when students can effectively signal their capabilities for the marketing jobs they apply for. The typical job listing website today categorizes entry-level roles as requiring up to 2 years of experience, and often specify desired marketing subskills and software. Marketing internships, historically considered the gateway to marketing experience before graduation, are increasingly challenging to obtain without prior marketing experience, leading to a lack of clarity among marketing students and educators about how to obtain experience.

The long-standing application of signaling theory to entry-level hiring (Spence, 1973) posits that in the absence of perfect information about students' future abilities, employers rely on quality signals of performance potential, with more "costly" signals coming from stronger applicants (Connelly et al, 2025). For marketing students, the traditional signals of quality, like a marketing degree, have become table stakes (evidenced by the many entry-level jobs and internships requiring experience). Many self-taught marketing practitioners and entrepreneurial creators also possess a degree of

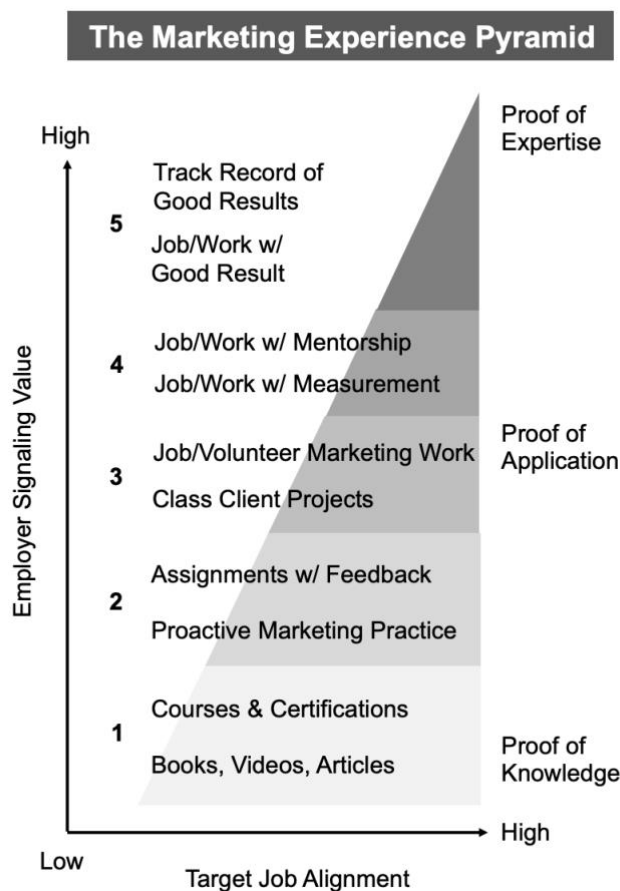
marketing experience in the competition for entry-level roles. This research is situated against the backdrop of (1) marketing experience being a job-seeking necessity while (2) the specific type and amount of necessary experience remains challengingly opaque, leading to (3) students struggling to direct their experience-seeking efforts. The motivating objective of this research is to provide a framework for students to obtain marketing experience efficiently and effectively by understanding the comparative signaling value of different experiences they can realistically obtain before graduation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Marketing Experience Pyramid offers a conceptual framework that enables students to assess the relative signaling value of different types of marketing experience. Its levels are derived from a general adaptation of the Kirkpatrick Model for evaluating training effectiveness (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006) with key details conceptualized using signaling cost theory and evidence from marketing education literature (Barr & Mcneilly, 2002, Bacon et al., 2023).

Figure 1.

The Marketing Experience Pyramid



In the Marketing Experience Pyramid, marketing experience ranges from proofs of learning, which are common and have low signaling value to proofs of marketing application to the rare empirical proof of marketing expertise at the top of the pyramid.

Time investment, effort, difficulty, and risk each contribute to an experience's signaling value. In the Pyramid, marketing experience can also be mapped along a secondary dimension—the degree of alignment with the student's target job.

Level 1 experience includes basic proofs of what a student has learned about marketing (e.g., books, articles, and videos). Higher in Level 1 are proofs of learning that include basic artifacts, like passing a marketing course or industry certifications. Level 2 includes initial demonstrations of marketing application including creative or technical practice, like unsolicited spec work. However, the signaling value is low without the constraints of a real marketing context or the feedback and guidance of an expert. Higher in Level 2 is applications from college course assignments with instructor guidance and feedback. Level 3 includes marketing applications for external audiences, beginning with class client projects. Higher in Level 3 is extracurricular paid or volunteer work for a company or organization without expert marketing oversight (potentially a small business owner or non-profit organization). Level 4 includes rarer, more professional forms of work, in conditions of ongoing measurement and reporting of performance. Higher in Level 4 are similar conditions, but under the direction of a more experienced marketer (this social proof acts as high signaling value to another prospective employer). Finally, Level 5 requires a campaign or work engagement with an empirically "good" performance result, as interpreted by a hiring manager, and must be partly attributable to the student's own decision-making. The rare student will reach the highest part of the Pyramid before graduation, only after achieving good results across multiple jobs, campaigns, or contexts. Several testable research propositions flow from this conceptual framework:

- P1. Experiences higher on the Pyramid are less common among students and have greater signaling value to employers than those lower on the Pyramid.
- P2. Contextual factors (e.g., target job alignment, leadership roles, evidentiary quality), can elevate the signaling value of individual marketing experiences above those at higher levels.
- P3. Students with more higher-level experiences before graduation have better job-seeking outcomes.
- P4. One Level 5 experience has greater signaling value than multiple lower-level experiences (quality over quantity).
- P5. Students overestimate the signaling value of Level 3 experience (e.g., treating marketing jobs equally; stopping the job search after securing a Level 3 job).
- P6. Lower-level experiences have decreased signaling value in the presence of higher-level experience (i.e., certifications have diminishing value after a student has the experience of a marketing job).
- P7. Student use of the Marketing Experience Pyramid is associated with positive marketing job-seeking outcomes (e.g., interviews, job offers).
- P8. Student use of the Marketing Experience Pyramid is associated with positive job-related psychological outcomes (e.g., confidence, anxiety reduction).

PILOT OPERATIONALIZATION

As a pilot, the Marketing Experience Pyramid was operationalized in two separate classes of senior digital marketing students in the following abbreviated description. In both classes, students received an instructor lecture and reference material about the Pyramid and its levels. Students applied their understanding by categorizing their resume experiences into the Pyramid levels. Students were then required to conduct job posting research in their target marketing career area to understand required entry-level skills and software. Finally, students were required to create a Personal Pyramid Plan to propose a set of actions they would take to gain experience further up the Pyramid and more in line with their target job. Students received feedback from the instructor about their plans and delivered a reflection at the end of the semester about their actions and progress. In one class variation, the instructor provided a custom-trained GPT to assist with resume categorization, job description research, and Pyramid plan creation and feedback.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING EDUCATION

The Marketing Experience Pyramid offers a conceptual framework that adds strategic clarity to a student's pursuit of marketing experience. In addition to helping reduce cognitive uncertainty, it helps students avoid inefficiency in their career-preparation activities by teaching the stepping stones to greater signaling power, including clearer opportunities to "level up" their existing activities and opportunities. Marketing educators can use the Pyramid to both mentor students as well as consider the signaling value of their own pedagogical elements. The framework offered in this research extends signaling theory in ways that integrate curricular and extracurricular student experiences, and through its propositions, outlines a promising roadmap for initial empirical validation with wide-ranging potential benefits to both marketing students and educators.

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TEACHING ETHICAL AI DISCLOSURE IN INFLUENCER MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used to create, translate, and adapt influencer marketing content, raising questions about whether AI involvement should be disclosed to consumers. This study examines how AI use disclosure condition affects perceived influencer authenticity and trust. In a between-subjects online experiment with 420 U.S. participants, respondents evaluated a fictitious influencer promoting GlowTea across three conditions: human translation with no AI, AI translation with disclosure, and AI translation without disclosure. Results show that undisclosed AI translation lowered both perceived authenticity and trust, while disclosed AI translation produced evaluations at least comparable to human translation. These findings suggest that AI assistance itself may not undermine influencer evaluations; rather, nondisclosure appears to damage authenticity and trust. The paper contributes to influencer marketing and source credibility research while offering marketing education implications for teaching ethical AI disclosure decisions, authenticity management, and trust-preserving influencer strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used to create, translate, and adapt influencer marketing content. These tools allow influencers and brands to communicate across languages and markets more efficiently, but they also raise a strategic and ethical question: when AI is used in influencer communication, should that use be disclosed (Davenport et al., 2020; Baek et al., 2026)? This question matters because influencer marketing depends on authenticity and trust. If consumers believe AI use is hidden, they may perceive the influencer as less genuine, even when the promotional message remains unchanged (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ohanian, 1990).

This study asks: What can consumer responses to AI use disclosure teach future marketers about authenticity and trust in influencer marketing? Specifically, it examines whether AI use disclosure condition affects perceived influencer authenticity and whether authenticity shapes trust in the influencer. The paper also considers how these findings can inform marketing education by positioning AI disclosure as an ethical communication decision, not simply a technology or compliance issue.

BACKGROUND

Influencers often function as human brands whose persuasive power depends on authenticity, credibility, and relational trust (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Authenticity reflects whether an influencer is perceived as genuine, sincere, and consistent with their expressed identity. When authenticity is threatened, consumers

may question whether the influencer’s message reflects genuine experience or strategic manipulation.

Source credibility theory suggests that message effectiveness depends partly on perceptions of the communicator’s trustworthiness and expertise (Ohanian, 1990). In AI-mediated communication, trust becomes more complex because consumers must evaluate both the human communicator and the role of technology in shaping the message (Lee & See, 2004; Riley & Dixon, 2024). Emerging research shows that AI disclosure can shape credibility, trust, and consumer evaluation (Baek et al., 2026; Schilke & Reimann, 2025). However, less is known about whether disclosed AI use in influencer communication is evaluated differently from undisclosed AI use, particularly when AI is used for translation rather than to generate the entire influencer message. Together, these arguments suggest that AI disclosure condition shapes trust through consumers’ interpretation of whether the influencer remains authentic and honest.

H1: AI use disclosure condition will significantly affect perceived influencer authenticity.

H2: Perceived influencer authenticity will positively influence trust in the influencer.

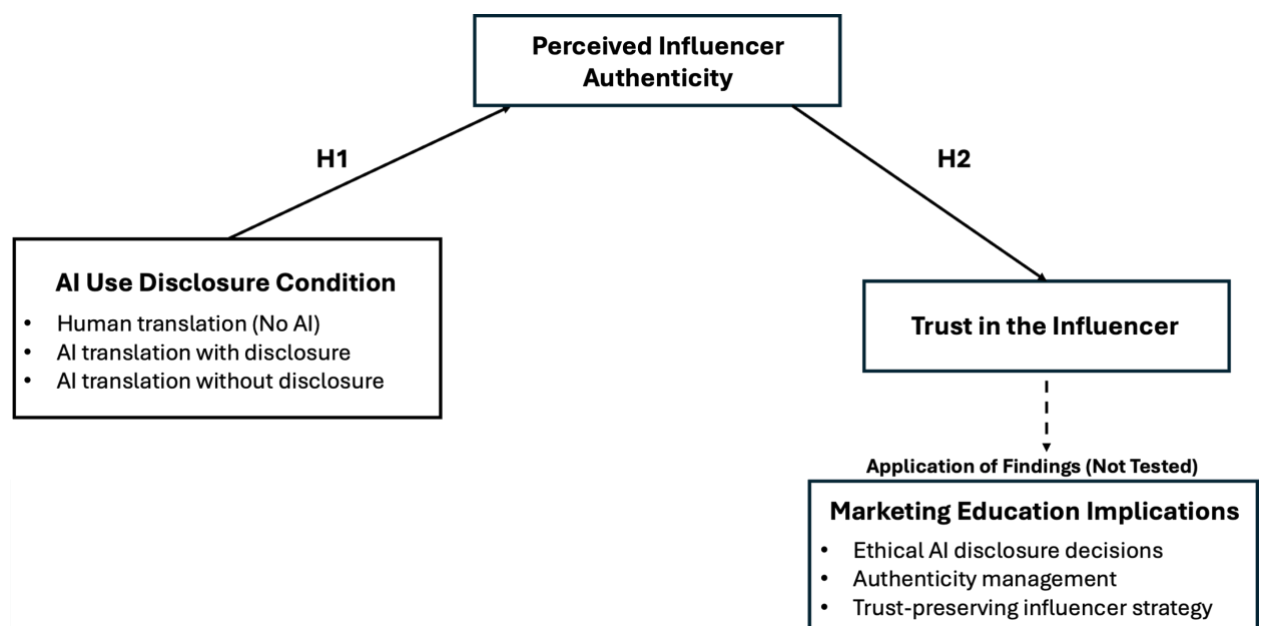


Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework of AI Disclosure Conditions and Influencer Trust

Note. The marketing education implications box represents an application of findings and was not tested as a study variable.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a between-subjects online experiment with a final sample of 420 U.S. participants recruited through CloudResearch. Participants evaluated a fictitious influencer promoting GlowTea in a culturally and linguistically relevant influencer marketing scenario. Although the stimulus was culturally and linguistically situated, the

study does not compare holiday and non-holiday contexts; the focal manipulation is AI-assisted translation disclosure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: human translation with no AI, AI translation with disclosure, or AI translation without disclosure. In the human translation condition, Emily was described as fluent in English and Mandarin. In the AI disclosure condition, Emily was described as using HeyGen.com to translate the message and disclosing that use. In the AI non-disclosure condition, she used the AI tool but did not disclose it.

The promotional message was held constant across conditions and included English and Mandarin versions of the GlowTea endorsement. Perceived authenticity was measured using items adapted from Audrezet et al. (2020), including “The influencer is genuine.” Trust was measured using items adapted from Ki and Kim (2019), including “I can rely on this influencer to provide accurate information about the things they discuss.” All scales demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values above .80.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Results indicate that AI use disclosure condition significantly affected perceived authenticity and trust. As shown in Table 1, trust was similar in the human translation condition ($M = 4.29$) and AI translation with disclosure condition ($M = 4.32$), but lower in the AI translation without disclosure condition ($M = 3.77$), $F(2, 417) = 7.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .034$. Similarly, perceived authenticity was similar in the human translation condition ($M = 4.85$) and AI translation with disclosure condition ($M = 4.90$), but lower in the AI translation without disclosure condition ($M = 4.45$), $F(2, 417) = 6.45$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .030$. Although the effect sizes were modest, the pattern is practically meaningful because undisclosed AI use consistently reduced both authenticity and trust. Tukey post-hoc comparisons showed that the undisclosed AI translation condition produced significantly lower trust and authenticity than both the human translation and disclosed AI translation conditions, while the human and disclosed AI translation conditions did not significantly differ.

Table 1

Mean Differences in Trust and Authenticity Across Conditions

Outcome	Human Translation	AI Translation w/ Disclosure	AI Translation w/out Disclosure	$F(df)$	p	η^2
Trust	4.29	4.32	3.77	$F(2, 417) = 7.26$	$< .001$	.034
Authenticity	4.85	4.90	4.45	$F(2, 417) = 6.45$	.002	.030

This pattern suggests that authenticity may help explain why undisclosed AI use reduces trust. These findings suggest that AI assistance itself does not necessarily damage influencer evaluations. Rather, negative effects appear to emerge when AI use is not disclosed. Disclosed AI translation generated authenticity and trust evaluations

that were comparable to human translation, while undisclosed AI translation produced lower evaluations on both outcomes. Consumers may accept AI assistance when its use is communicated honestly, whereas undisclosed AI use may violate expectations of honesty and authenticity, reducing trust in the influencer.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

Theoretically, this study contributes to source credibility and influencer marketing research by showing that authenticity is an important explanatory construct linking AI disclosure conditions to trust. The findings suggest that source credibility theory remains relevant in AI-augmented influencer communication, but credibility cues may change when technology is involved. Disclosure may operate as a signal of honesty, while nondisclosure may signal artificiality or deception (Baek et al., 2026; Schilke & Reimann, 2025).

Practically, marketers should not assume that AI disclosure automatically harms influencer effectiveness. For campaigns involving translation, voice adaptation, or other assistive AI tools, disclosure may protect the influencer-audience relationship by reducing perceptions of hidden manipulation.

For marketing educators, the findings highlight three teaching implications. First, students should learn to evaluate AI disclosure as an ethical decision, not merely a technical or compliance issue. Second, students should understand authenticity management, including how disclosed and undisclosed AI use may shape whether consumers perceive influencer communication as genuine. Third, students should practice developing trust-preserving influencer strategies, such as writing disclosure language, comparing consumer responses to AI-assisted content, and identifying when nondisclosure may be perceived as deceptive. One way to teach this is through a classroom case exercise in which students compare the human translation, disclosed AI translation, and undisclosed AI translation scenarios, then discuss which approach best protects authenticity and trust while allowing marketers to use AI tools responsibly. These implications align with calls for GenAI-era marketing education that emphasizes career readiness, ethical reflection, and AI competencies for future leaders (Farache Aureliano Da Silva et al., 2025; Gupta & Jaiswal, 2024; Mehmet et al., 2025).

This study is limited to one AI application: translation in influencer communication. Future research should examine whether similar effects occur with AI-generated avatars, voice cloning, synthetic influencers, or AI-written endorsements. These extensions can also inform marketing pedagogy by helping educators design classroom activities in which students compare AI disclosure strategies, evaluate consumer trust risks, and practice responsible influencer communication guidelines.

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BUILDING A CULTURE OF RESEARCH AND WRITING IN A COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

Research productivity is perhaps the primary reason tenure-earning faculty fail in achieving tenure and promotion – and it is a key part of achieving or maintaining accreditation. Sustained productivity in a College of Business can be facilitated by a culture of research and writing. This paper reports on the development and early results from a bi-monthly writing group designed to help tenure-earning faculty in their research endeavors. While too early to see changes in research output, the group of tenure earning faculty reported improved collegiality and accountability. Changes in the next session include an improved communal writing log, inclusion of tenured faculty, and opportunities for research presentations. Additionally, determining how to meet the needs of more versus less prepared faculty is necessary. Finally, leadership and hosting of the group will be turned over to the participants.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching, service, and research: the triumvirate responsibilities of an academic, particularly a tenured or tenure-earning faculty member. Of these three, what seems to trip faculty up the most is the research responsibilities. It is the most opaque of the three, and the one in which results take months or even years to appear. And while failure in any of the three can halt or detour an academic career, the lengthy time frame and solitary nature of research can hide emergent issues. Not only does this affect the faculty member it also affects colleges of business as a whole, particularly for accreditation purposes and particularly in a time when faculty preparation is undergoing significant changes, such as fully online programs. This research explores an effort designed to support tenure-earning faculty in developing good writing habits.

BACKGROUND

This research reports on an intervention implemented at an AACSB-accredited regional institution. Over the last few accreditation cycles, research productivity at the institution declined significantly in terms of quantity (quality, however, increased). The college's leadership team (CLT) determined one reason for this decline was an anemic culture of research and writing. While never strong, the existing research culture decayed further as long-established, productive faculty members retired or otherwise left the institution, necessitating a significant number of new tenure-earning faculty to be hired into a situation with little support or mentoring. The CLT aims to develop a supportive and productive culture of research and writing, believing that this will lead to a long-term, sustainable increase in research productivity.

Existing research into individual research productivity indicated that productivity for an academic writer is dependent on steady progress. Multiple authors recommend scheduling and tracking writing sessions, noting that virtually anyone can carve out 15 or 20 minutes most days of the week (Boice 2000; Goodson 2023; Silvia 2019). Boice (1990) also suggests that creating social contracts can be an effective method for getting writing done. Belcher (2019) created a structure based on these notions of steady writing and social contracts to move her readers from project inception to publication, including how to respond to reviewers.

Writing groups have been used to increase research productivity, primarily as a way to improve accountability among group members, often formed by the members themselves. However, Franks (2018), for example, describes a more formal effort sponsored by a department in a medical school that resulted in increased manuscript submissions.

Building on this research, we established Research Fridays.

METHODOLOGY

To encourage the development of a culture of research and writing, Research Fridays were established in Fall 2025. The focus of these bi-monthly sessions was to build skills and encourage accountability. These efforts consisted of two modes: one an optional, unstructured group writing session in which participants could join a Teams meeting to simply write in the virtual presence of others. While never heavily attended, typically two or three participated.

The second mode was a monthly workshop and is the primary focus of this report. The workshop participant and structure is next described more fully.

PARTICIPANTS

This first iteration of the Research Fridays workshop was aimed primarily at tenure-earning faculty. Attendance expectations for tenure-earning faculty were framed as “expected and strongly encouraged” but not required (note, tenured and instructional faculty were “welcomed”). Eight tenure-earning faculty from across the college met these criteria. Disciplines included economics, accounting, finance, data science and information systems, marketing, management, human resources development, and business law. Participants included five men and four women; five faculty had international origins and four were of domestic origin. Participants varied in terms of their tenure clock from first year to final year.

The sessions were led by a member of the college leadership team, the Associate Dean for the Undergraduate School and were not part of the evaluation process. To further establish the disconnect from the evaluation process, the faculty chair and college dean attended only as invited.

STRUCTURE

Eight sessions were held throughout the academic year 2025-26. To create a relaxed and casual environment sessions were brownbag lunches with snacks and beverages provided by the college. Sessions consisted of a review of group progress, updates on individual research progress, and troubleshooting and advising. We also

celebrated research milestones - acceptances, publications, other. This lasted about 15 minutes. The remaining time was spent as a workshop with topics such as institutional review board expectations and requirements, tenure process, and collaboration.

To encourage accountability and slow, steady progress, participants were asked to complete a weekly time log noting their time spent on research and words written (or equivalent).

RESULTS

Attendance

While one participant attended only two sessions, most participants attended about five of the eight sessions. Two of the participants attended all of the sessions.

The writing sessions typically saw two or three participants join. The workshop format typically saw attendance of six or seven participants. This is likely due to the voluntary nature of the sessions. While encouraged and expected, attendance was still voluntary. Whether the spotty and sporadic attendance at the writing-only sessions was simply a reluctance to join or whether it stems from a lack of priority for research or a lack of research to complete is uncertain.

Sociability and Accountability

The biggest win was the creation of human connection – a key element of culture. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to build stronger relationships and to share concerns and struggles about research, writing, and teaching. For one faculty member who teaches solely in an on-line program and whose entire department moved to the College of Business from another, this deliberate interactivity was particularly important in her adjustment.

While participants enjoyed working with other tenure-earning faculty, they also wanted to leverage the knowledge and experience of tenured faculty.

Many participants noted the accountability that the bi-monthly meetings provided. The writing log saw mixed reviews. Some of the participants appreciated its purpose and reported that it kept them on track while others found it cumbersome and problematic. They also wanted to see more opportunities for presentations about their on-going research.

Professional Development

While some of the participants appreciated the professional development opportunities, one participant found some of the professional development activities such as those around collaboration annoying and disparagingly labeled this as a need for basic research and as “remedial”.

From the point of view of the CLT, the workshops provided an opportunity to provide information to tenure-earning faculty collectively rather than relying on them gathering this information by happenstance. Specifically, participants were exposed to available university resources, IRB requirements, as well as tenure expectations and processes specific for the College of Business. Ultimately, it provided a way to continue on-boarding new faculty.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Changes for next year include turning leadership and hosting responsibilities over to the group, improving the reporting mechanism, and encouraging participation of tenured and instructional faculty. Additionally, due to the lukewarm reception, we'll re-design the writing log to accommodate the request for research presentations.

While it is too early to see whether research productivity increases, we believe that sustained productivity depends on our ability to build a culture of research and writing. This research reports on the first iteration of a long-term effort toward building that culture of research and writing.

Increasingly, we see faculty with different levels of preparation and experience in research. A strong, stable, and sustainable culture of research and writing in which novices are supported and provided resources is necessary for long-term success – both the faculty member and the college or department as a whole.

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MAKING SUSTAINABLE BENEFITS TANGIBLE THROUGH ANALOGIES

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ABSTRACT

Advertisements for sustainable products may describe benefits that are accurate but difficult for consumers to use in product evaluation. This research examines whether analogies can make energy-efficiency benefits more tangible and, in turn, increase purchase intention. Three between-subjects experiments recruited 900 U.S. homeowners that viewed an advertisement for an energy-efficient air conditioner containing either an analogy-based sustainability claim or an objective claim. Study 1 found a modest direct effect of analogy use on purchase intention. Studies 2 and 3 did not replicate that direct effect. However, both demonstrated significant indirect effects through perceived tangibility. Analogy use increased the extent to which the benefits seemed concrete, clear, and understandable, which subsequently predicted purchase intention. Green consumption values predicted responses but did not moderate the tangibility-to-purchase-intention relationship. The findings identify perceived tangibility as the primary mechanism through which analogical framing can convert abstract sustainability claims into consumer-relevant benefits across varying environmental value orientations.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers routinely encounter sustainability claims that are factually meaningful but difficult to translate into purchase-relevant consequences. An air-conditioner efficiency rating, for example, may signal reduced energy use without helping homeowners understand how consequential the benefit is or why it should influence product choice. This creates a communication problem: sustainable attributes may be available in the advertisement but insufficiently concrete to enter the decision process. Research has identified environmental attitudes, norms, trust, perceived value, and green consumption values as predictors of sustainable purchasing, yet offers less guidance on how marketers can communicate abstract, technical benefits so consumers can understand and evaluate them. This research asks whether analogy-based advertising can bridge that gap by making energy-efficiency benefits more tangible.

BACKGROUND

The research integrates the tangibility component of the SHIFT framework with analogical learning theory. SHIFT proposes that sustainable behavior is more likely when outcomes are concrete, clear, and personally relevant (White et al., 2019). Related work argues that climate information has limited influence when consumers cannot form a usable understanding of its implications (Habib et al., 2021).

Analogies may provide that usable understanding. Structure-mapping theory explains analogy as the transfer of relational knowledge from a familiar base domain to a less familiar target domain (Gentner, 1983). Consumer research has primarily applied this process to really new products whose categories or benefits are unfamiliar (Gregan-Paxton & John, 1997). The present research extends that logic to a familiar product category, residential air conditioning, in which the product is known but its sustainable benefit remains technical and difficult to visualize. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model where analogy use increases purchase intention directly and via perceived tangibility, and whether this pathway is stronger among consumers with higher green consumption values (Haws et al., 2014).

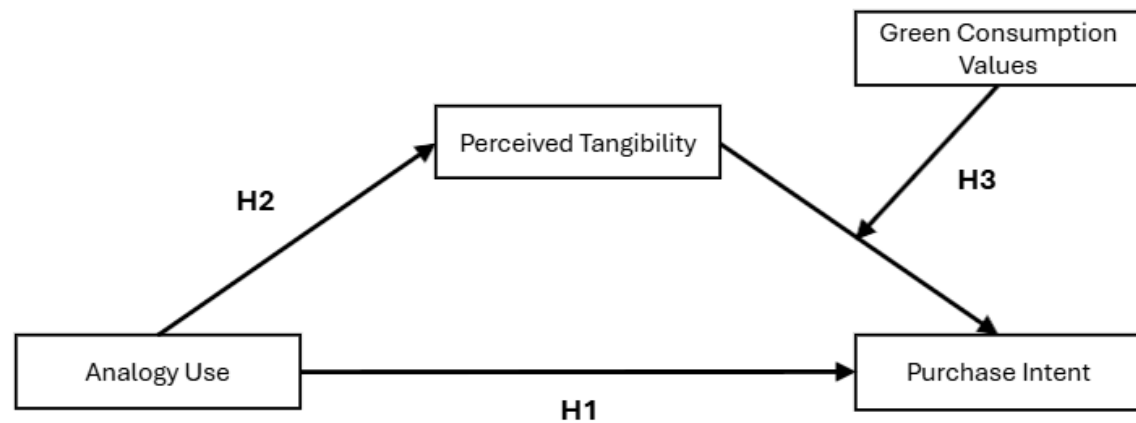


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

METHODOLOGY

Three between-subjects online experiments recruited 300 U.S. homeowners per study through Prolific (N = 900). Participants imagined shopping for a new home air conditioner and were randomly assigned to view one of two advertisements for a fictitious brand and model. Both advertisements contained identical layouts, product images, brand information, and energy-efficient features. The experimental advertisement compared the product's efficiency benefits with those of familiar LED lightbulbs. The control advertisement summarized the same benefits using an objective, nonanalogical statement.

Purchase intention was measured on a five-point likelihood scale. Studies 2 and 3 also measured perceived tangibility with three items assessing whether the energy-efficiency benefits appeared tangible, were clearly communicated, and were easy to understand. Study 3 measured green consumption values using the six-item GREEN scale (Haws et al., 2014). Analyses included independent samples t-tests and Hayes PROCESS mediation and moderated-mediation models.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Study 1 found that analogy use modestly increased purchase intention relative to the objective claim (M = 3.78 versus 3.58), $t(298) = 2.00$, $p = .047$, $d = .23$. The effect remained significant after controlling for age, gender, income, and education. Studies 2

and 3 did not reproduce a significant total effect on purchase intention, indicating that an analogy is not automatically persuasive merely because it is present.

The more consistent finding concerned perceived tangibility. In Study 2, analogy use increased perceived tangibility, which predicted purchase intention; the indirect effect was significant, $b = .20$, 95% CI [.08, .32]. Study 3 replicated this indirect effect, $b = .17$, 95% CI [.05, .30]. A post hoc serial mediation in Study 2 further indicated that analogy use increased tangibility, which improved attitude toward the advertisement and subsequently increased purchase intention.

Green consumption values were positively associated with purchase intention, but they did not moderate the effect of perceived tangibility on purchase intention. The indirect effect remained significant at low, medium, and high green consumption values. Thus, tangibility appears to operate primarily as a comprehension and evaluability mechanism rather than as a persuasion process limited to environmentally committed consumers. Across the studies, the evidence supports a qualified conclusion: analogies influence sustainable product evaluation when they successfully convert an abstract benefit into a concrete and usable basis for judgment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Theoretically, the findings provide mechanism-level evidence for the tangibility proposition within SHIFT. They also extend analogical learning beyond really new products to benefit-level understanding in familiar categories. The results caution against treating analogy as a universally persuasive rhetorical device; effectiveness depends on whether the comparison changes how consumers respond to the advertised benefit.

For practice, marketers should design analogies that connect technical attributes to familiar, consequential outcomes. Comparing SEER2 with another efficiency metric may improve feature comprehension, but an analogy should also clarify what the efficiency produces for the consumer or environment. Because the tangibility pathway was not contingent on green consumption values, such messages may be suitable for broad-market campaigns rather than only environmentally conscience audience segments.

Future research should compare verbal, visual, and multimodal analogies; test categories differing in involvement and technical complexity; validate perceived tangibility as a construct distinct from clarity and mental imagery; and examine consequential outcomes such as information search, quote requests, willingness to pay, and actual choice. Research should also test whether green consumption values become more influential when the communicated benefit is primarily environmental rather than simultaneously environmental, functional, and economic.

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OWN YOUR VOICE: A PERSONAL BRANDING PROJECT FOR THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents Own Your Voice, a personal branding project in an introductory marketing course. The project consists of three deliverables: a four-page Evidence Deck, a 30–60 second AI-assisted lyric video, and an AI Usage Log. Students first complete a human-only discovery stage to develop their own story, then translate that evidence into a target audience, value proposition, positioning, brand voice, and trade-off decisions. Only after students confirm their strategy, do they use generative AI to develop lyrics, music, visuals, and video. The project shifts assessment from marketing vocabulary recall to strategic judgment: defining direction, rejecting generic outputs, adapting tools, and taking responsibility for the final work. Results suggest that students did not simply use more AI; they became more capable of directing it toward a clear marketing purpose.

INTRODUCTION

Generative AI has shifted marketing education. Students can now use accessible tools to create content, and most arrive already familiar with these technologies. For example, 72% of students in my Principles of Marketing course had used ChatGPT before my AI-integrated project, and most scored highly in basic AI literacy. They understood that AI can be inaccurate, that outputs require verification, and that responsible use includes source attribution. With these skills now common, the question is: what should colleges teach next?

Storytelling has become one of the most sought-after skills in business today. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that companies are "desperately seeking storytellers," with the number of job postings for storytelling roles and executive mentions at an all-time high (Deighton, 2025). The Own Your Voice project addresses this by focusing on personal branding. Instead of using AI to generate generic content, students are encouraged to define their goals, audience, and positioning, using AI as a tool rather than a crutch. The goal is to keep students in control: human direction, AI execution, and human judgment.

BACKGROUND

In marketing, memorable campaigns are driven by unique stories – narratives that differentiate brands and connect with the audience. As generative AI transforms the industry, advertising copy, images, scripts, and videos can all be generated quickly and at acceptable surface quality. Now, the industry focuses on the art of storytelling and strategic differentiation (Deighton, 2025; HubSpot, 2025). What now distinguishes effective marketers is their ability to define a clear audience, uncover meaningful insights, and make strategic choices that set their story apart from the rest.

This shift brings new challenges for marketing education. When students can generate polished content with AI in seconds, the real test is not vocabulary recall, but whether they can make disciplined, strategic choices using core concepts. As industry leaders emphasize, a meaningful campaign requires students to craft a unique story, clearly define their target audience, and identify what sets their message apart. Without this depth of strategic thinking, AI-generated outputs risk being polished but generic, missing the human insight needed for persuasive storytelling.

Personal branding is an ideal vehicle for experiential learning in marketing education. Building a personal brand requires students to explore their authentic identity and lived experiences, a process that inherently resists the generic, fabricated outputs generative AI tends to produce (Stanton & Stanton, 2013). Students must engage in genuine self-discovery to uncover their unique value proposition, something AI cannot do for them. In this way, personal branding captures the essence of experiential learning: it compels students to navigate ambiguity, make disciplined strategic choices, and continually refine their work as they connect evidence to audience insight and translate that into positioning (Karns, 2005; Phan, 2024). Through authentic exploration combined with disciplined strategy, students develop the agency and judgment that distinguish them in a world of automated content.

METHODOLOGY

The pedagogical design of this course was anchored in authentic discovery and strategic differentiation. The sequence began with a midterm project in which students transformed a real consumer decision from their own lives into a short-form story. They gathered live actual evidence, and interpreted their experience using marketing concepts, with all initial analysis completed without AI involvement. This tool-agnostic approach then allowed students to select and combine production tools, including AI, to communicate their story more effectively, emphasizing that technology should serve original thinking, not replace it.

Building on this foundation, the final project challenged students to move from recounting past experiences to defining their personal brand and vision. Here, students identified their unique strengths, target audience, value proposition, positioning, and explicit trade-offs, developing a strategy that only they could own. Only after this strategic groundwork did students use AI to help realize their creative vision, producing an original song, lyric video, and comprehensive evidence deck. This represented a significant step beyond the midterm, requiring students to articulate and express an identity rather than simply narrate an event.

The project unfolded in three stages: human-only discovery to surface authentic insights, application of core marketing constructs for strategic clarity, and creative execution using AI and other tools. The explicit articulation of trade-offs and the iterative creative process ensured that students remained in control of both strategic direction and brand voice throughout. Reflection was continuously encouraged through an AI Usage Log that documented their goals, prompts, outputs, satisfaction, and decision-making at each step.

To complement these experiential learning processes, students completed a longitudinal survey at three points during the semester to measure changes in AI use frequency, comfort, literacy, and applied self-efficacy. Survey responses were linked across time and analyzed with linear mixed-effects models, enabling assessment of both

individual learning trajectories and the overall impact of the course interventions. This provided a quantitative perspective to enrich the qualitative insights gained through the project.

RESULTS

Linear mixed-effects models revealed significant longitudinal growth across all major AI outcomes, with consistent developmental patterns across course sections. Foundational AI Literacy, relatively high at baseline, steadily increased from T1 to T3 (6.05 to 6.64), $\chi^2(2) = 49.30$, $p < .001$. More pronounced growth occurred in Applied AI Self-Efficacy (5.08 to 5.97), $\chi^2(2) = 48.16$, $p < .001$, highlighting students' growing confidence in adapting AI outputs to their own ideas. Additionally, the Perceived Value of Reflective Prompting rose significantly between T2 and T3 (4.80 to 5.54), $\chi^2(1) = 18.13$, $p < .001$.

Qualitative responses provided further insight into the nature of this change. At baseline, students frequently described AI in terms of responsible use, accuracy, and support rather than replacement, consistent with their relatively high initial AI literacy. Following the midterm project, reflections shifted toward the mechanics of directing AI, particularly the importance of prompt specificity, context, revision, and output evaluation. By the final project, students increasingly described AI as a set of capabilities that could be selected and combined to support creative execution while retaining ownership of the underlying ideas and decisions. Longitudinal responses illustrate a progression from general awareness of AI's benefits and limitations toward more deliberate prompting, tool selection, and human-directed creation. Together, these qualitative patterns complement the significant increase in Applied AI Self-Efficacy and suggest that students' development involved not simply greater AI use, but also a greater ability to direct AI toward personally defined goals.

Overall, the results suggest that the course did more than increase familiarity with AI: students became more adept at translating their own ideas into effective AI-generated outputs while maintaining control over strategy, evaluation, and refinement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

As generative AI accelerates the commoditization of digital content, the ability to craft authentic and differentiated narratives has become the defining skill for marketers (Deighton, 2025; HubSpot, 2025). Simply mastering new software or prompt techniques is no longer sufficient; what matters is the capacity for human judgment and strategic direction. Marketing education must therefore move beyond technical proficiency and focus on cultivating the agency and critical thinking needed to guide AI toward meaningful outcomes (Grewal et al., 2025; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Embedding assignments in lived experience and personal branding, as demonstrated here, helps students develop these essential capabilities (Stanton & Stanton, 2013; Karns, 2005; Phan, 2024).

Assessment practices should evolve in parallel. Rather than rewarding only polished outputs, rubrics must explicitly value the strategic process, how students

define boundaries, reject generic responses, and justify creative decisions. By making students' reasoning visible through reflective logs and human-only discovery stages, educators can better evaluate true learning. Ultimately, the goal is not to train students as passive AI users, but as adaptive directors who orchestrate technology in service of authentic storytelling and differentiation.

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AGENTI AI AND THE RENAISSANCE OF MARKETING HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The rapid emergence of agentic artificial intelligence (agentic AI)—autonomous computational systems capable of goal-driven planning, workflow management, and independent task execution—is fundamentally transforming the dynamics of digital marketing, making conventional higher education obsolete. To the contrary, because superficial growth hacks and tactical execution are rapidly automated, the deep, systematic, and methodological knowledge cultivated within higher education institutions becomes essential. Students who master formal marketing theories—and learn to translate those frameworks into the strategic guidance of autonomous AI agents—will possess an indispensable advantage in commercializing business ideas. By embracing this agentic AI wave, higher education institutions can decisively reaffirm their institutional value proposition, training the next generation of business leaders to govern, rather than be replaced by artificial intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, higher education institutions have faced scrutiny regarding the real-world applicability and return on investment of business curricula (Guha et al., 2023). In terms of marketing education, this challenge has been exacerbated by the emergence of hyperdynamic digital platforms, where superficial tactics (e.g., search engine optimization (SEO) manipulation, viral social content, and vanity engagement metrics) often overshadowed foundational strategic planning (Canbulut, 2025). However, a new wave of artificial intelligence (AI) is catalyzing an unprecedented paradigm shift within market structures, especially agentic artificial intelligence (agentic AI)—autonomous computational systems that are capable of goal-driven planning, workflow management, independent task execution, and transaction execution with minimal human involvement (Murekian, 2026; Richter et al., 2024)

Whereas earlier AI iterations focused primarily on predictive analytics or dynamic content generation, current technological trajectories point toward agentic AI. As these AI agents undertake operational tasks traditionally performed by human consumers (e.g., product comparison and online shopping), the underlying mechanics of consumer acquisition are being redefined. Instead of human shoppers manually browsing e-commerce sites, scrolling through content feeds, or being influenced by vanity key performance indicators (KPIs), such as likes, views, and impressions, autonomous agents are increasingly tasked with serving as surrogate buyers (Adhikari, 2026).

When consumer choices are influenced by autonomous software agents operating on logical parameters rather than human emotional vulnerabilities, the efficacy of conventional superficial digital tactics diminishes (Davenport et al., 2020). Consequently, this paper contends that the advent of agentic AI does make higher education marketing obsolete. Instead, it significantly enhances its value proposition.

Systematic marketing education, grounded in structured process modeling, market segmentation, explicit value proposition design, and concrete product attributes, acts as the primary instrument for the commercialization of innovations in a market increasingly dominated by AI agents.

LITERATURE REVIEWS: EVOLVING MARKETING EDUCATION

To understand the resurgence of formal marketing education, it is crucial to examine the evolving methods of consumer discovery. Marketing education in higher education has traditionally emphasized the development of strategic competencies, analytical reasoning, and structured decision-making methodologies (Huang & Rust, 2021) to understand human psychologies, enabling marketers to predict and accommodate consumer needs and wants. Therefore, it was essential to uphold the fundamental principles of university marketing curricula that emphasize systematic frameworks such as the STP (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) model, optimization of the marketing mix (the 4Ps), and quantitative market research (Barnes & de Ruyter, 2022),

Fueled by internet technologies, online searches and e-commerce have been governed by search engine algorithms engineered to resonate with human psychology (Mumtaz, 2024), resulting in the emergence of digital heuristics, including social proof metrics (e.g., likes, shares, views, and impressions) from social media platforms, search engine optimization (SEO) link-building strategies, and engagement duration, alongside digital visual appeal. In this context, products with subpar specifications may achieve market dominance through aggressive emotional branding or search engine manipulation, given that conventional digital marketing tactics heavily depend on amplifying human cognitive biases and search engine indexing mechanisms (Negricea & Purcarea, 2026).

On the other hand, agentic AI operates through systematic cognitive architectures that integrate working, episodic, and semantic memory with intentional reasoning-acting loops (Adhikari, 2026). Agentic AI embodies a transformative shift from generative AI that mainly assists with content generation or data analysis to autonomous systems capable of performing complex workflows and making decisions independently. Unlike generative AI, agentic AI can orchestrate entire marketing processes, encompassing market research, campaign implementation, and customer engagement (Richter et al., 2024). Agentic AI does not comprehend human emotions, succumb to impulsive buying, or favor visually appealing landing pages. It analyzes structured data schemas, explicit product specifications, supply chain reliability metrics, total cost of ownership, and verifiable SLA (Service Level Agreement) criteria (Keegan et al., 2022).

With this shift from generative AI to agentic AI, marketing professionals must transition from being content creators to system designers and process orchestrators who can manage autonomous AI agents effectively. AI agents reduce the value of superficial engagement metrics and increase the importance of systematic product positioning and concrete information distribution. Consequently, digital marketing will have to adjust its sole focus on human-centric search engine optimization (SEO) to machine-to-machine (M2M)-centric agent engine optimization (AEO), wherein compliance with structured data standards, transparent unit economics, and logical value propositions determine brand selection.

Table 1:*Structural Comparison of Marketing Paradigms*

Dimension	Human-Centric SEO Marketing	Agentic Machine-to-Machine (M2M) Centric AEO Marketing
Primary Target	Human cognitive & emotional faculties	Autonomous software agent utility algorithms
Primary Interface	Graphical User Interfaces (GUI), Webpages, Social Apps	Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), Schema.org, Knowledge Graphs
Key Decision Drivers	Emotional resonance, brand prestige, social proof, visual appeal	Specification fit, objective price-to-performance ratio, SLA verification
Dominant Tactics	Growth hacking, clickbait headlines, influencer marketing, ad retargeting	Agent Engine Optimization (AEO), structured data modeling, API integration
Evaluation Metrics	Click-Through Rate (CTR), Impressions, Likes, Dwell Time	Conversion Rate by Agent Match, API Query Volume, Feature Completeness Score
Curricular Requirement	Tactical digital tool training, creative design, social media tools	Systematic marketing theory, product architecture, data analytics, value proposition design

Recent studies suggest that agentic AI in marketing education requires both educators and students to move beyond generative AI tasks toward autonomous workflow orchestration, where students learn to design and execute marketing tasks using AI agents (Richter et al., 2024). This shift necessitates a profound reevaluation of marketing curricula to prepare students for a business environment in which AI agents, rather than human beings, will increasingly perform online search and purchasing activities

The emergence of user-friendly generative AI tools initially challenged the value of formal business education, as anyone appears to produce aesthetically pleasing marketing content instantly. Nonetheless, the advent of agentic AI contradicts this premise. While generative AI tools democratize tactical digital content creation, agentic systems require sophisticated strategic orchestration, coherent problem framing, and methodological oversight to preserve value and avoid strategic drift (Adhikari, 2026; Weege, 2025).

Higher education institutions provide a rigorous environment for developing these analytical and strategic capabilities (Johnson, 2026). By moving away from the basic digital media tactics and leaning back into the foundational marketing science—augmented with AI literacy and multi-agent systems orchestration, higher education can re-establish its unique value proposition. Academic institutions prepare students not only to operate technology but also to systematically commercialize innovations by governing autonomous AI ecosystems and disciplined marketing principles.

DISCUSSION

The move to agentic AI is a structural change in the discovery, evaluation, and purchase of consumer products and services. Marketing strategies will need to pivot from appealing to human emotional biases to interfacing with objective, machine-driven decision models, as autonomous agents will increasingly replace human web browsing and online shopping behaviors.

Research on AI integration in marketing education emphasizes the need to integrate AI-related tasks and technologies with course learning outcomes to ensure students develop the essential competencies in data-driven marketing, system design, and workflow management (Richter et al., 2024). Students trained in systematic marketing methodologies are better prepared to design, deploy, and manage AI agents that can autonomously perform marketing tasks based on logical, data-driven criteria rather than mechanically driven social signals. The agentic AI wave does not make formal marketing higher education obsolete but emphasizes the necessity of methodological marketing education, with academic business institutions being vital in facilitating future corporate strategy and economic value generation.

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CREATING SHARED VALUE THROUGH RETAIL CONSULTING PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators continually seek high-impact learning experiences that move students beyond textbook concepts and into authentic business environments. While experiential learning has become a common pedagogical approach, many projects focus primarily on student learning outcomes. Drawing on Stakeholder Theory, this paper argues that retail consulting projects create shared value for multiple stakeholder groups, including students, local businesses, universities, and the broader community. Over two semesters, approximately 120 undergraduate retailing students partnered with eight local businesses to conduct retail audits, interview business owners, administer customer surveys, analyze findings, and deliver professional consulting recommendations. Student reflections revealed high levels of engagement and perceived learning, while several participating businesses implemented recommendations related to customer relationships, store design, promotional activities, and operational efficiency. This paper presents a stakeholder-based framework for understanding how community-engaged retail consulting projects simultaneously support student development, strengthen university-community relationships, and contribute to local economic vitality.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators have long recognized the value of experiential learning as a means of helping students bridge the gap between theory and practice (Kolb, 1984; O'Connor & Moran, 2023). While classroom cases and simulations provide opportunities to apply concepts, they often lack the ambiguity, complexity, and stakeholder interaction found in real business environments. As a result, educators increasingly seek opportunities to immerse students in authentic business challenges that require critical thinking, data collection, analysis, and professional communication. At the same time, universities are increasingly expected to contribute to the communities in which they operate. Particularly in college towns, students spend four years living, working, and consuming within local economies, yet many educational experiences remain disconnected from the businesses and organizations that surround them. Community-engaged learning projects provide an opportunity to strengthen these connections while simultaneously enhancing student learning outcomes (Guanlao et al., 2025).

The purpose of this paper is to argue that retail consulting projects represent a unique form of high-impact experiential learning because they create value for multiple stakeholders simultaneously. Drawing upon Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), we propose that retail consulting projects should not be viewed solely as educational activities designed to benefit students. Rather, these projects create shared value across a network of stakeholders that includes students, local businesses, universities,

and the broader community. To illustrate this approach, we describe a retail consulting project implemented across two undergraduate retailing courses involving approximately 120 students and eight local businesses. Students served as temporary marketing consultants, conducting retail audits, interviewing business owners, collecting customer feedback, analyzing data, and delivering actionable recommendations. The resulting projects generated meaningful learning experiences while also providing participating businesses with market insights that informed operational and marketing decisions.

BACKGROUND

Stakeholder Theory suggests that organizations create value not only for a single beneficiary but for a network of stakeholders who are affected by organizational activities (Busch et al., 2018; Freeman, 1984). Within higher education, experiential learning projects are often evaluated primarily through student outcomes such as engagement, satisfaction, skill development, and career readiness (Guo et al., 2020; Nimri et al., 2024). While these outcomes are important, they represent only one dimension of value creation. Community-engaged consulting projects provide a broader perspective by recognizing that multiple stakeholder groups may benefit from the same educational activity. Students gain practical experience and professional confidence. Businesses receive research-based recommendations and customer insights. Universities strengthen relationships with local communities. The broader local economy may benefit when businesses implement strategies that improve competitiveness, customer satisfaction, and long-term viability. This stakeholder perspective is particularly relevant for retailing education because local retailers often operate with limited resources and may lack access to formal market research. Undergraduate students, guided by faculty expertise, can serve as valuable partners in gathering and analyzing customer information. In this way, classroom projects become mechanisms for knowledge exchange and community development rather than simply assignments completed for a grade.

METHODOLOGY

The retail consulting project was implemented across two undergraduate retailing courses over two semesters. Students selected from a portfolio of participating local businesses and worked in teams throughout the semester. The project required students to complete several interconnected activities. First, students conducted observational retail audits designed to evaluate store atmosphere, merchandising, customer flow, promotional activities, and overall customer experience. Second, students interviewed business owners or managers to better understand organizational goals, challenges, and competitive positioning. Third, students designed and administered customer surveys to gather consumer feedback regarding satisfaction, shopping behavior, and perceptions of the business. Finally, students analyzed their findings and delivered both a written consulting report and a professional oral presentation. The project intentionally exposed students to authentic business ambiguity. Unlike traditional textbook cases, students worked with organizations facing real marketplace challenges and interacted directly with business owners whose decisions affected employees, customers, and community stakeholders. This structure

provided a low-risk environment in which students could apply concepts related to retailing, consumer behavior, customer experience management, relationship marketing, promotional strategy, and emerging technologies.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from both student reflections and business feedback suggests that the project generated meaningful outcomes across stakeholder groups. Student responses consistently emphasized the value of applying classroom concepts in authentic settings. One student noted, “I loved the consulting assignment project... applying what we were learning into a real-world presentation that felt like it had an impact.” Another stated, “My favorite thing about this course was doing a project with a local company.” Similarly, students highlighted the opportunity to move beyond classroom walls, with one noting, “I loved getting out of Kelley and applying what I learned throughout my marketing classes into a real-world presentation.”

Beyond student perceptions, participating businesses reported implementing several recommendations generated through the consulting projects. A local pizza retailer adopted student recommendations related to relationship-building efforts with Greek organizations and expanded its use of entertainment-based promotional activities. Another participating retailer redesigned aspects of its store layout to improve customer traffic flow and shopping experiences. One business introduced customer cooking classes to strengthen engagement and create additional value for customers. Another adopted AI-supported systems for inventory and supply ordering based on student recommendations. These examples suggest that student-generated insights extended beyond academic exercises and influenced actual business practices. While the long-term effects of these changes require further study, the implementation of recommendations demonstrates the potential for classroom consulting projects to create tangible value within local communities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

From a theoretical perspective, this project extends experiential learning research by demonstrating the value of a stakeholder-based approach to community-engaged learning. Rather than focusing exclusively on student outcomes, educators should consider how educational activities create value across interconnected stakeholder groups. This perspective aligns with emerging calls for universities to engage more directly with community needs while preparing students for professional careers (Petersen et al., 2022).

Practically, retail consulting projects offer a scalable model for strengthening university-community relationships. Students gain experience working with real clients, collecting data, and communicating recommendations. Businesses receive actionable insights that may otherwise be unavailable due to resource constraints. Universities strengthen their reputation as community partners, while local economies benefit from increased collaboration and innovation. Future research should more formally assess stakeholder outcomes through longitudinal tracking of business implementations, business-owner interviews, and measures of student professional development. Such research would provide a richer understanding of how community-engaged consulting projects contribute to both educational and economic outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Retail consulting projects represent a powerful mechanism for creating shared value among students, businesses, universities, and local communities. By engaging students in authentic business challenges, educators can simultaneously enhance learning, support local business development, strengthen community relationships, and contribute to local economic vitality. Viewed through a stakeholder lens, these projects demonstrate that experiential learning can serve purposes far beyond the classroom, creating benefits that extend throughout the communities in which universities operate.

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RESPONSIBLE AI IN SALES EDUCATION: THE AIMS FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming professional selling and sales education. While AI tools can assist students with prospecting, call planning, objection handling, and customer communication, they also create new pedagogical challenges. Students may generate polished sales outputs without developing the underlying competencies required for effective selling. This paper introduces the AIMS framework, Awareness, Interrogation, Moral Judgment, and Skill Preservation, as a practical model for integrating AI into sales curricula while preserving ethical accountability and authentic selling competence. Drawing from literature on sales education, expertise development, feedback processes, and AI-enabled learning, the framework identifies three instructional risks associated with unmanaged AI use: capability atrophy, ethical drift, and relational degradation. The paper provides guidance for sales educators seeking to balance AI fluency with human skill development and offers recommendations for course design, assessment, and future research.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a future consideration for sales education. Students already use generative AI tools to draft prospecting emails, prepare sales presentations, summarize buyer information, generate objection-handling responses, and support call planning (Chen et al., 2020; Rong & Yu, 2023; Yang et al., 2020). These technologies offer significant opportunities for learning by reducing barriers to practice, increasing access to feedback, and exposing students to tools increasingly used in professional sales environments (Dai et al., 2024; Gligorea et al., 2023; Liaw et al., 2023a, 2023b; Wang et al., 2024). The challenge facing sales educators is not whether students should use AI, but how AI should be integrated into professional selling curricula. Sales competence develops through practice, feedback, reflection, and repeated interaction with customers and prospects. Students must learn how to ask effective questions, listen actively, respond in real time, exercise ethical judgment, and build authentic relationships (Ingram et al., 1992; Johnston & Marshall, 2021). When AI is introduced without appropriate instructional structure, students may produce polished outputs without developing the underlying capabilities those outputs are intended to demonstrate. This research argues that sales education must move beyond teaching students how to use AI and instead teach them how to use AI responsibly (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Nieminen & Carless, 2022; Syam & Sharma, 2018). To address this challenge, the paper introduces the AIMS framework—Awareness, Interrogation, Moral Judgment, and Skill Preservation—as a practical guide for integrating AI into professional selling and sales management courses.

BACKGROUND

Current conversations regarding AI in higher education often focus on adoption, efficiency, and innovation. While these are important considerations, they do not fully address the developmental nature of sales learning. Three instructional risks warrant particular attention. The first is capability atrophy. Students may outsource critical learning activities to AI before developing foundational selling skills, reducing opportunities for deliberate practice and expertise development (Ericsson, 2003, 2006; Ericsson & Pool, 2016; Taylor et al., 2024). If AI routinely generates prospecting messages, discovery questions, or objection responses, students may never fully develop these competencies themselves.

The second risk is ethical drift. AI-generated recommendations may appear objective or trustworthy even when they contain bias, exaggeration, manipulation, or privacy concerns. Without explicit discussion and reflection, students may fail to recognize the ethical implications associated with AI-supported persuasion and customer communication (Johnston & Marshall, 2021). The third risk is relational degradation. Effective selling depends on empathy, listening, trust-building, adaptability, and relational responsiveness (Ingram et al., 1992; Johnston & Marshall, 2021). AI can generate language that appears authentic without teaching students how to genuinely understand customer needs or respond appropriately in real-world interactions. These risks suggest that AI integration should be viewed as a pedagogical design issue rather than simply a technology issue (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Nieminen & Carless, 2022). Sales educators need frameworks that help students leverage AI while preserving the human capabilities that remain central to selling effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a conceptual development approach. Relevant literature from professional selling, sales management, expertise development, feedback processes, ethics, and AI-enabled learning was reviewed to identify recurring concerns regarding student dependence on AI and its implications for skill development. The framework was informed by literature on deliberate practice (Ericsson, 2003, 2006), feedback processes (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996, 1998; Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021), sales competence development (Johnston & Marshall, 2021), and AI-enabled learning environments (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Gligorea et al., 2023). The resulting synthesis informed the development of the AIMS framework as a practical instructional model for responsible AI integration within sales curricula. The framework was designed to address the specific developmental challenges associated with professional selling education, where performance outcomes depend heavily on communication skills, judgment, adaptability, and relationship-building.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The AIMS framework consists of four instructional priorities.

Awareness encourages students to understand both the strengths and limitations of AI tools. Students should recognize where AI can assist with idea generation, research, and preparation while also understanding risks associated with hallucinations, bias, and

superficial personalization (Chen et al., 2020; Gligorea et al., 2023; Syam & Sharma, 2018).

Interrogation emphasizes critical evaluation of AI-generated content. Students should learn to question AI outputs, verify information, identify assumptions, and compare AI recommendations with what skilled sales professionals would actually do in a given situation (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Nieminen & Carless, 2022; Winstone et al., 2017).

Moral Judgment reinforces ethical accountability. AI-generated content does not eliminate the salesperson's responsibility for decisions involving persuasion, privacy, fairness, or customer trust (Johnston & Marshall, 2021). Students should be taught to evaluate not only whether AI outputs are effective but also whether they are ethically appropriate.

Skill Preservation emphasizes maintaining opportunities for students to develop foundational selling competencies independently. Role-plays, live presentations, discovery conversations, and objection-handling exercises should continue to require direct student performance rather than reliance on AI-generated scripts (Ericsson & Pool, 2016; Taylor et al., 2024; Passalacqua et al., 2024).

Taken together, these four dimensions provide a framework for balancing AI fluency with authentic skill development. Rather than viewing AI as either a threat or a solution, the AIMS framework positions AI as a tool that requires thoughtful instructional design and active human oversight.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

For sales educators, the primary implication is that AI should be integrated developmentally. Students should often demonstrate competence independently before using AI as a support tool (Ericsson & Pool, 2016; Taylor et al., 2024). Comparative assignments, reflective exercises, and AI-free performance assessments can help distinguish genuine competence from AI-assisted fluency (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021; Nieminen & Carless, 2022). For sales management courses, AI should be discussed not only as a productivity tool but also as a governance and leadership issue. Future sales managers will be responsible for overseeing AI-enabled selling environments, addressing ethical concerns, and coaching employees who rely heavily on AI-generated recommendations (Groza et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019; Syam & Sharma, 2018).

Future research should examine how AI influences sales skill development, ethical decision-making, confidence, and career readiness. In particular, scholars should investigate whether AI increases perceived competence faster than actual competence and identify instructional approaches that best balance technological innovation with authentic learning. Ultimately, responsible AI sales education is not about limiting technology. It is about ensuring that students develop the judgment, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal capabilities necessary to succeed in increasingly AI-enabled sales environments.

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RETHINKING AI AS A LEARNING TOOL IN MARKETING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

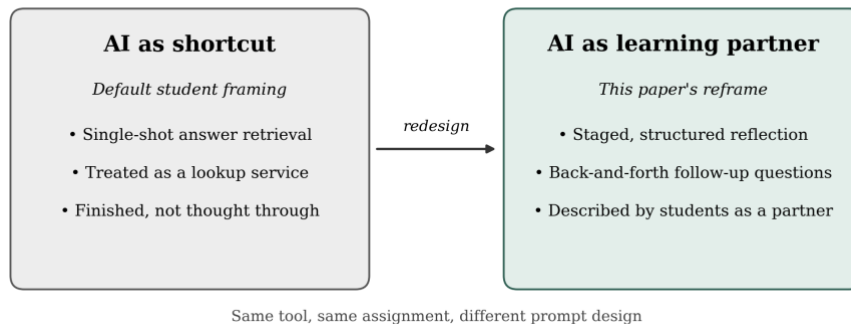
Students, and many faculty, tend to treat generative AI as a shortcut, not a thinking tool. This paper questions that framing using a personal SWOT analysis assignment, which senior marketing majors have completed for years, redesigned around a structured AI prompt and delivered in a “collision” session pairing marketing students with information technology majors learning to code and program with AI. Marketing students were surprised by how much thought had gone into building the prompt itself, described the exchange as closer to working with a partner than querying a tool, and grew curious about prompt engineering once they saw IT students constructing it. The process also caught resume gaps every student had missed on their own. For marketing educators, the paper argues this kind of redesign builds a skill employers increasingly expect while sharpening the self-knowledge students need walking into an interview.

INTRODUCTION

Ask a college student what generative AI is for, and the answer is usually about speed: a way to produce a draft or a finished deliverable with less effort than doing the work directly. That framing is not wrong, but it leaves out a question that matters more for how AI actually gets used in a course: what does it make possible for an assignment a student cannot simply hand off to it? We took up that question with a personal SWOT analysis, an assignment senior marketing majors have completed for years without AI. We redesigned it around a structured AI prompt and delivered it in a “collision” session pairing marketing students with information technology majors who were themselves learning to code and program with AI. What follows describes that redesign, what we noticed running it, and why we think it matters for marketing educators trying to prepare students for a job market that expects more digital range than most marketing curricula teach.

Figure 1

Reframing AI as a Learning Partner



Note. This figure summarizes the paper's central argument, not measured data.

BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the current conversation about AI in higher education is about integrity: whether AI-generated work counts as a student's own, and how to catch it when it doesn't. That conversation matters, but on its own it leaves students with the idea that the main relationship to have with AI is adversarial. A quieter question gets less attention in marketing education specifically: what does AI make possible for a reflective, personal assignment, the kind that is harder to fake because it asks a student to look inward instead of researching outward?

There is also a practical gap driving this. Marketing graduates often arrive at their first job expected to do a little of everything: build strategy, sell it internally, and execute the technical side, SEO, analytics, a website, without much formal training in any of it. Marketing curricula do not usually build that range, and one course cannot fix it. What one session can do is put marketing students next to peers who think that way for a living or are training to. We paired marketing students with information technology students learning to code and program with AI, on the theory that brief exposure is worth something. Recent work on generative AI literacy in marketing classrooms makes a similar case for exposing students to different interpretations of what these tools do well and where they fail (Beninger et al., 2025), and a growing thread in the marketing education literature treats prompt engineering itself as a competency marketing programs need to teach directly rather than leave to chance (Torkestani et al., 2025).

The SWOT analysis at the center of the session is not new. Senior marketing majors have completed a version of it for years as a self-assessment exercise, without AI. What was new was redesigning it around a structured prompt (see Appendix) to see whether that changed what the assignment could do.

METHODOLOGY

The session centered on two linked exercises. In the first, students individually copy/pasted a structured "mega-prompt" into a chatbot of their choice, walking them step by step through the SWOT format the course has used for years: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, with the model pausing for reflection after each

section rather than producing everything at once. Students uploaded their resumes as part of the process, and the AI-guided review caught gaps in skills and experiences that students had but were not showing on the page, gaps every student had missed on their own. The prompt also directed the model to search the web for external threats and opportunities in the student's field before generating a structured summary table.

Marketing students were paired with information technology students who understood the mechanics behind a prompt like this, and that is where the session produced its most useful reaction. Marketing students were surprised by how much thought had gone into the prompt's construction, and IT students, in turn, were intrigued by the idea of running a SWOT on themselves. That crossover produced a shared recognition that building a good prompt is its own kind of creative work, not just a technical instruction, and left several marketing students wanting to learn more about prompt engineering. Students also described the back-and-forth, especially once the model asked follow-up questions, as feeling less like a query and more like working with an additional partner.

In the second exercise, groups fed the SWOT output back into the same conversation and asked the model to characterize their current personal brand, then propose a more intentional strategy and ask clarifying questions in return. This tested whether the model could hold context across turns in a way that prompted real reflection rather than generic advice, and gave students a rough draft of the kind of personal-brand language that shows up in interviews and LinkedIn profiles.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This was a single class session, not a formal study, so what follows is instructor observation, not measured data; no survey or coded transcript was used. We did not see mixed groups behave differently from same-major groups in any way we could point to. Instead, the difference lay in what each major found most interesting. IT students were drawn to the SWOT concept itself, since self-analysis is not something their coursework usually asks of them. Marketing students were drawn to the mechanics behind the prompt, how it was built to draw out better answers, and started asking questions about prompt engineering as a skill worth learning on its own. The resume review inside the SWOT exercise surfaced gaps in every student's resume, which suggests the assignment is doing diagnostic work beyond the reflection it was originally designed for. And the "partner" language students used to describe the exchange, unprompted, is worth taking seriously: it suggests students are forming a working relationship with these tools rather than treating them as a lookup service, which is a different starting point for how they will use AI after graduation.

Table 1*What Each Major Found Interesting*

	IT majors	Marketing majors
What intrigued them	Running a SWOT on themselves, self-analysis outside their usual coursework	The mechanics behind the prompt, how it was built to draw out better answers
Shared reaction	Recognized prompt engineering as a creative skill, not just a technical instruction; marketing students wanted to learn more about it	

The principal classroom observations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2*Summary of Classroom Observations*

Classroom Observation	Instructional Significance
Marketing students expressed surprise at the amount of planning required to construct an effective AI prompt.	Prompt engineering, usually invisible to marketing students, became something they could see and wanted to learn.
Students described the interaction as feeling more like working with a partner than simply querying a tool.	Students treated AI more like a collaborator than a lookup service.
AI-guided questioning revealed resume gaps students had previously overlooked.	The structured prompt caught resume gaps a standard exercise likely would have missed.
Cross-disciplinary interaction increased curiosity about prompt engineering among marketing students while introducing IT students to reflective self-analysis.	Each major noticed something about the other that its own coursework does not usually surface.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

Taken together, the classroom observations summarized in Table 2 suggest that redesigning an assignment like this addresses two needs graduates increasingly face. First, employers increasingly expect marketing hires to direct AI tools well, not just use them, and the marketing education literature has begun treating prompt engineering as a competency to teach directly (Torkestani et al., 2025). Watching students respond to a well-built prompt and then want to build one themselves suggests exposure alone can

spark that interest. Second, marketing graduates often enter interviews expected to speak fluently about strategy, persuasion, and technical execution, SEO, analytics, web development, a range most marketing programs do not build directly. Pairing students with technically trained peers and running them through an AI-guided self-assessment that catches what a resume exercise alone misses gives students a sharper answer to “what are your strengths” before an interview. That connects to related work linking AI-supported personal branding to career readiness (Turner-Henderson et al., 2025). Scaling this would benefit from a real measurement instrument, and future work should test whether the effect holds across a full unit, and whether the technical pairing is doing the work or a similarly structured prompt would produce the same shift alone.

APPENDIX

Personal SWOT Analysis Prompt (Instrument Used in Exercise One)

Directions given to students: Copy/paste the following prompt into a chatbot and answer the questions it asks honestly and thoughtfully.

“I am a college student preparing to enter the workforce. I want to conduct a personal SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis with your help, focusing on my employability and career path. To do this effectively, guide me through the process step by step.

Steps 1–4: Start with Strengths, asking me a few thoughtful questions to help me uncover meaningful insights. Give me time to reflect and respond before moving on to Weaknesses, then Opportunities, and finally Threats. Your goal is to prompt deep thinking, help me recognize patterns, and uncover interesting connections I might not have considered. Your questions should cover the following areas:

- Strengths: My skills, talents, experience, accomplishments, interests, personality traits, and qualities that set me apart—both professionally and personally.
- Weaknesses: Areas where I struggle, skills or experience I lack, habits that hold me back, and possible blind spots.
- Opportunities: External trends shaping my marketability and potential, personal or professional growth possibilities, and resources or relationships I could leverage—especially ones I might overlook.
- Threats: External factors that could present challenges, obstacles, and risks, such as AI and technology shifts, economic conditions, job competition, social trends, legal regulations, and political shifts.

Step 5: Once I have answered all four sections, invite me to add information like my Enneagram number and Myers-Briggs type or to upload my resume.

Step 6: Search the web for any external threats or opportunities in my field that I might not be aware of.

Step 7: Analyze my responses and the results of your search from Step 6 (external threats and opportunities) and generate a structured SWOT analysis. Format the output as a table with strengths beside opportunities and weaknesses beside threats to highlight key takeaways. Look for patterns, unexpected insights, and meaningful connections between different areas. Conclude with a reflection on how I can capitalize on strengths, improve weaknesses, seize opportunities, and mitigate threats.

Ask me the first question when you're ready and move through each section at a pace that allows for meaningful reflection."

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NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: HOW AI IMPACTS STUDENTS WHO DO NOT USE AI

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ABSTRACT

Since the launch of ChatGPT, artificial intelligence has infiltrated the world of education. Scholars have been investigating how and why students might use AI tools to assist their schoolwork, but students who have not used AI for their schoolwork have largely gone unrepresented in research. This study looks into the impact that artificial intelligence has on the quality of work students submit– both AI users and non-AI users– and how the threat of academic repercussions affects their work. Results indicate that those who do not use AI are largely going about work as usual, not letting the threat of AI affect their work, but are seeing more repercussions for AI accusations than those who are actively using AI.

INTRODUCTION

One of the pioneering tools in the world of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), ChatGPT, was launched through OpenAI in November of 2022 (Marr, 2023). In the three years since the launch, generative AI has spurred many controversies and debates within higher education (Gupta, 2024). These debates are often centered around the use of generative AI by students when completing academic assignments (Vieriu, 2025) , but there is currently a gap in the literature when looking towards the impact that artificial intelligence has had on the students who do not use gen AI tools in their academic career.

Not all students within higher education utilize these tools newly at hand (Freeman, 2025). On the surface, there would be no reason to expect any significant change for these students as they do their work as students always have, without additional assistance. Hence why early literature into students and AI has remained focused on the students who are using these tools, not those abstaining (Bewersdorf, Hornberger, Merdel & Schiff, 2025). However, with professors attempting to restrict student use of these tools through AI checkers and personal knowledge of student work, there is the potential that students who are not using them are now changing their writing styles, and editing habits to prove they are not using AI.

This research seeks to investigate how the growing use of generative artificial intelligence in higher education affects the students who do not seek to use AI in their work, specifically preventing them from achieving their highest writing potential. This study will explore how much control students feel they have over their grades and how much effort they are making to complete their work to the best of their abilities. Specifically, are students who are not using AI, avoiding utilization of professional grammar and formal writing in order to prove the writing is their own? This is an area that has not been explored and is in need of further exploration, as the results impact how students approach academic work and how professors evaluate and grade that work.

First, a review of the current AI literature is presented. Next the hypotheses are explained followed by the methodology for this study. The results are presented, and a discussion of their implications leads to the conclusion of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since generative AI tools have entered the educational scene numerous studies have been undertaken regarding frequency of use as well as why a student uses gen AI (Chen, Talant, & Selig, 2025; Črček & Patekar, 2025; Dai, 2025; Ivanov, Soliman, Tuomi, Alkathiri & Al-Alawi 2024). One study found that only four respondents said that professors noticed the usage of AI, while 82% of respondents use AI to generate ideas. Other frequent usages of AI mentioned include paraphrasing, summarizing, proofreading with only 18% of respondents stating that they are using ChatGPT for the entire assignment (Črček & Patekar, 2025). Another study examined the decision making of students who choose to use AI, and the factors that go into that decision such as the desire for help with brainstorming and to use AI as a tool to expand potential. Many students use AI to walk them through unfamiliar processes as a teaching tool. The students however, approached AI with caution knowing that there were limitations in what the AI generated and lacked complete confidence in those results (Dai, 2025).

Exploration into how generative AI tools can influence a student's proficiency in writing is a major topic of interest amongst scholars. There is a concern amongst educators that AI tools are curtailing the creativity of students and stunting their critical thinking skills or ability to generate ideas purely from their own brain (Marzuki, Widiati, Rusdin & Indrawati, 2023). Supporting this claim, researchers found that an over-reliance on AI diminished student's critical thinking skills (Vieriu & Petrea 2025). Obstacles such as a computer's limits on accountability and how much it can handle learning prohibits proficiency in a classroom through reliance on generative AI (Pasham, 2022). Another pressing issue when looking into generative AI is ChatGPT's ability to generate text that emulates that of a college student's writing may lead to a decline in literacy rates of students, and questions how educators can effectively teach the art of writing beyond the use of AI (Basgier, 2025).

Studies report that in an academic setting AI content has a history of outperforming the content submitted and written by actual students. AI content is curving the grade and causing human content to be scored lower in comparison, thereby unfairly affecting the grades of the students (Kalantis and Cope, 2025). In the same vein, AI content is often considered more readable with higher levels of diversity in language but lacks the insight, details, and subjectivity that comes with human written content although generally there is a high level of difficulty in truly deciphering AI content from human content (Hadan, Wang, Mogavi, Zhang-Kennedy & Nacke, 2024). Similarly, researchers have discovered that the content generated through AI produced neutral opinions & tended to present information in an overly literal and overly detailed manner (Alexander, Savvidou, & Alexander, 2023).

Previous research has just begun exploring how AI detection models are being implemented into schools in order to determine whether or not a student has used AI to generate an assignment (Xu & Sheng, 2024). Callie Holtermann, a reporter for the New York Times conducted interviews with students who have been accused of and deducted points for using AI when the student submitted fully human written content. They go a step farther by describing that alongside writing an assignment, there is a new fear that

content needs to be easily discernible from AI generated content. That task gets harder as AI technology improves, especially as students utilize and train AI (Holtermann, 2025).

Several studies point to a fear of plagiarism or academic dishonesty claims as the main reason students avoid using AI (Thomson, Pickard-Jones, Baines & Otermans, 2024; Grassini, 2023). Many students who are avoiding AI usage are worried that reliance on ChatGPT would hinder their critical thinking skills and be detrimental to their academic growth (Baek, Tate, & Warchauer 2024). Many AI activists present concerns that there is not a diverse enough representation of work being fed into the AI which can then limit the scope of what students can achieve in the classroom when relying on AI (Grassini, 2023).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Students and their academic self-worth have always been tied to the grades received from the assignments turned in. However, the consequences of obsession over grades have led towards unhealthy competition and cheating on assignments (Romanowski, 2004). In today's age, that tends to mean students will trust an AI model to generate content that will outscore their personal work. However, there are still students who distrust AI models and instead prefer to turn in their own personal work due to concerns over academic integrity (Kirsanov, Kushwah & Selvaretnam, 2026).

H1: Students who use AI less are more confident in their own non AI work, than their AI using classmates are in their non AI work.

As AI is still so new, AI detection services do not have any true evidence, merely estimations developed from statistical patterns (Fowler, 2023). Many students have developed a fear of being falsely accused of using AI to the point where they seek advice from other students online on how best to avoid accusations. One example of this involves running their own work through AI detection services which has ethical implications of its own (Deep 2025), one such implication is that in putting human generated work through AI services, even detections services, familiarizes the programs with more types of writing, thus contributing to the false positives. Due to this effort in disguising AI work, it is likely that:

H2: Students who do not use AI are more likely to modify their work to include less grammatically correct writing when concerned about AI detection.

Since the onset of generative AI hitting academia, many scholars have identified AI tells, or aspects of writing that tend to be incorporated into artificially generated content. These writing aspects include excessive use of commas, semi colons, and em dashes along with other punctuation marks typically seen in professional writing medical journals or magazines (Mummery, 2025). To combat this phenomenon, lists have been compiled in order to instruct others towards detecting the usage of AI in writing they encounter (Gunawardhana, 2025); (Kujur, 2025) However, as AI was trained on pre-existing literature written with proper grammar and punctuation published through organizations such as BigScience, accessed through open source channels such as Common Crawl (Baack, 2024), these tells are formally accepted by publishers.

H3: Students who use AI are less likely to get caught using AI than those who are not using it are to be accused of using it.

One major aspect that tends to shape a student's view towards cheating involves the desire to use other factors to get ahead (Simkin & McLeod, 2009). As many students who use AI view it as a tool to assist their learning they may not consider the use to be cheating, whereas those who do not use AI have stricter views on what does and does not constitute cheating (Gorichanaz 2023). Therefore:

H4: There is a significant difference between those who use AI, and those who use it rarely or never and what they consider cheating.

METHODOLOGY

To gauge AI usage within current college students, data was collected using a qualtrics survey. The study had two paths– one track for those who use AI frequently in their academic career and one for those who do not. Each track posed questions about the confidence students have in the assignments they submit, what prompts them to use or not to use the tool, and their perception towards the accusation of having used AI. This survey was posted on numerous social media platforms including but not limited to Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YikYak with a message attached asking for college students to partake. In total by the end of the collection period the survey received 137 responses. Seven responses were removed for incomplete data, leaving a total usable sample of 130 participants. Roughly 70% of the respondents identified as female. Nearly 80% of participants are in their third or fourth year of higher education, and their average age was 21.

Fifty-six percent of participants stated that they use AI often when completing coursework, while 44% of participants use AI rarely or never when completing coursework. Participants who do use AI, primarily use AI for generating ideas, checking answers and as a search engine. When asked why they use AI, they responded that they use it primarily because it saves time and helps them learn. Students who use AI, use it for all classes, in and out of major, however 64% said they were most likely to use it in an online asynchronous course.

RESULTS

H1: Students who use AI less are more confident in their own non AI work, than their AI using classmates are in their non AI work.

About 80% of students who use AI are confident in their non AI work, while those who use AI rarely or never are 100% confident in the non AI work they produce. There is a significant difference between the average score of students who use AI in their confidence in their non AI work ($M=1.93$, 1=Very confident, 5=Very not confident) and students who rarely or never use AI and their confidence in their non AI work ($M=1.71$) ($t(3)=-1.966$, $p=.05$). Even more interestingly, there is a significant difference for students who use AI ($t(59)=18.01$, $p=.001$), as their confidence in their work that utilizes AI was greater than their confidence in their own non AI work ($M=2.25$).

H2: Students who do not use AI are more likely to modify their work to include less grammatically correct writing when concerned about AI detection.

This hypothesis was not supported as students who are using AI rarely or never, are still working to produce their best possible work. Ninety-six percent of participants said they follow proper grammatical rules and 67% of participants never leave errors in their work intentionally. Over half of those surveyed (58%) said they never modify their work to prove it is not AI. Meanwhile 53% of students who use AI modify their output to hide that they used AI.

H3: Students who use AI are less likely to get caught using AI than those who are not using it are to be accused of using it.

When asked if they have been caught using AI, only 6% of students who use it often say they have been caught. When asked if they were accused of using AI for any of their work that was not AI, 22% of participants said they had. There was a significant difference between those who were accused of using AI, with those who don't use AI being more likely to be accused ($M=1.78$), than those who use AI ($M=1.94$) ($t(129)=32.817$, $p=.001$). When asked what the outcome was after being accused, students who had used AI reported that there were no repercussions. Students who had not used AI but were accused of using it had to redo the assignment or failed the assignment completely.

H4: There is a difference between those who use AI, and those who use it rarely or never and what they consider cheating.

Those who use AI more often found having AI solve homework problems as less significant cheating compared to those who use AI rarely or never. In comparison, those who use AI rarely or never found looking up answers during an online quiz to be less of a significant form of cheating than those who frequently use AI.

DISCUSSION

Students who report never or rarely using AI to assist their academic assignments feel great confidence in the work they submit and seem to refuse to let the threat of AI affect the quality of their work. However, the survey reports that students who rarely or never use AI are getting accused of the use of AI and facing repercussions at a higher rate than those who do use AI for their assignments. These results were surprising as AI policies seem to be affecting non AI users more than AI users despite the general attitude when comparing their personal work to AI generated work appearing to be less relevant than hypothesized.

Educators should bear in mind how punishing students for the use of AI without solid proof of the usage ends up disproportionately affecting non AI users and punishing students for submitting work that is grammatically correct. To combat this issue, educators could request to receive drafts throughout the writing process as a way to see the natural progression of the student's work, or require writing to be done in class to eliminate the lingering question of AI usage.

LIMITATIONS

Many students fear consequences of being caught using AI in academic settings, so some respondents of this survey may have understated their AI usage in their survey answers. Some responses to this survey as posted on social media include “I don’t trust this” from an anonymous user on YikYak. This posits that students may have been hesitant to take a survey admitting to AI usage. Similarly, despite being a confidential survey, students may have selected answers that make them seem like better students. Another major limitation would be the population that the survey was able to reach. This was primarily taken by students attending a large Northeastern university. Future research could attempt to replicate these findings in other locations and with a more diverse population. More research should also focus on faculty grading and assessment of AI generated work in order to better understand how to better support students not using AI, instead of penalizing them.

CONCLUSION

Generative AI in academic settings has led towards less trust between students and professors causing accusations of AI usage. While many non-AI user students have not let their personal work suffer in response to the onset of AI, they have still faced repercussions for alleged AI usage at an even higher rate than those who do use AI. Further punishment directed towards the threat of academic dishonesty could lead towards the non-AI user students to begin the alteration of personal work in a way that could both show the lack of AI usage and lessen the quality of submitted work. The combination of these factors may prevent students from achieving their highest academic potential in response to the distrust between educators and students. Colleges and universities as well as faculty members need to strongly consider their AI policies as current policing methods and tools are not only ineffective but negatively impacting honest student work. In addition, faculty should set up safety measures to monitor the drafting process of assignments to see the progression of work, and be better able to recognize authentic content, allowing students to submit their highest quality of work without the fear of being accused of the academic dishonesty that comes with AI usage.

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LET'S CHAT, CHAT! STUDENTS LEARNING TO CREATE CHATGPT MARKETING ASSISTANTS

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is new technology that students are not familiar with properly using for their future marketing careers in the retail industry. Thus, this teaching innovation addresses the need for students to be AI trained in a marketing retail management course. This teaching innovation assisted students in creating their own AI Marketing Assistants with the widely used ChatGPT Teams platform. The uniqueness of this project was in enhancing a traditional course final project consisting of creating a retail business plan through strategically incorporating AI related content (e.g., guest speaker lectures on AI best use practices such as prompting, citing, and ethics). Students then developed their own Marketing Assistants to help them build unique retail business plans. The outcome of this project was that students liked using AI, AI was useful to them, and that they felt they would use AI in the future. Future exploration and challenges are addressed.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT is new technology that students are not familiar with properly using for their future marketing careers in the retail industry. According to Harvard Instructor Christina Inge, "Your job will not be taken by AI. It will be taken by a person who knows how to use AI" (Russell, 2026). This startling reality that students will need to be properly trained to use AI is something that marketing faculty are facing while universities are still discussing AI best practices and reinforcing syllabi technology use clauses. Thus, this teaching innovation addresses the need for students to be AI trained in a marketing retail management course.

METHODOLOGY

The teaching innovation, which was funded by an internal grant, assisted students to create their own AI Marketing Assistants using the widely used ChatGPT Teams version. The uniqueness of this project was in enhancing a traditional course final project (i.e., creating a retail business plan) by strategically incorporating AI related content. For instance, in class a guest speaker taught AI usage by introducing students to concepts such as good prompting techniques, ethics in using AI, and even citing AI use. The students developed excel spreadsheet logbooks to help them record their activities in prompting AI for input questions and output responses. Additionally, students created their own ChatGPT Teams group whereby they developed an AI Marketing Assistant (this idea came from a free AMA webinar to incorporate into my course), and finally students trained the AI Marketing Assistant to help them build their own unique retail business plan from product to prices, target market, promotion, retail space, financial budgeting, and more. Students were able to create a retail business plan in small groups (between

3-4 students) for Teams Based Learning (TBL) and Problem Based Learning (PBL). Creating an AI Marketing Assistant to develop a unique retail business plan uses the highest form of Bloom's Taxonomy in Learning (i.e., create). The AI generated retail plan projects were then presented as business pitches in the form of PowerPoint presentations, which were then peer scored for the top 3 best retail business ideas for our university location. This peer scoring activity gave students interest in their peers' presentations and helped them to recognize groups who had the top presentations where top scorers got additional points for scoring well. Additionally, the deliverables for this project went beyond a graded class project as students were encouraged to keep their work to showcase in their portfolios to future business employers to exemplify their use of AI.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Originally out of a handful of students (5 or less) of a class of approximately 50 students, at least 90% of the class had not used AI before and only one of the students who used AI was at the level of using it more proficiently than the rest of the class (i.e., they had their own paid for version of ChatGPT). Overall, students surveyed about their use of AI for this project shared that they liked using AI, AI was useful to them, and that they felt they would use AI in the future. This feedback shows how students who have never had AI exposure before could come to have a positive perception of AI simply by introducing clear terms of usage in marketing curriculums so that students are excited rather than afraid of using AI in their future careers.

IMPLICATIONS

For future exploration, other marketing educators can take a current course project and transform it into an AI project by asking students to use AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) to assist them with their project. Ideally, this would include teaching best practices of good prompting (e.g., prompting specifics, descriptive words, SMART goals, etc.), having students create a logbook so that the marketing educator can easily see what steps the students are taking to use AI, and have students cite use of AI (e.g., this image was generated by Copilot).

The biggest challenge was to learn how to use AI at the same time as the students. Often, students would recognize issues that I would have to resolve (e.g., ChatGPT Teams payment account issues were addressed by paid subscriptions being obtained only by the team lead to be used by other group members rather than having separate accounts for each student). It was important to ask students to keep an excel logbook of their AI work documenting their name and time accessed so that accountability for all team members could be assessed. Also, challenges regarding ethical use, prompting, etc. could be addressed early on by asking other AI savvy faculty or staff to guest speak and offer suggestions are also helpful.

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ADAPTING CASE-BASED MARKETING EDUCATION TO GENERATIVE AI: QUALITATIVE INQUIRY FOR PRESERVING JUDGMENT, LEARNING PROCESSES, AND TEACHING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) enables students to produce polished work while bypassing the intellectual struggle through which persistence, critical thinking, and judgment develop. This study examines how experienced case teachers are responding to this challenge in business and marketing education. Using qualitative expert interviews with approximately 20 recognized case instructors, the research will investigate changes in pre-class preparation, classroom discussion, assessment, and the instructor's role. The study will develop an empirically grounded account of how case-based education is changing and a set of principles for preserving its learning purposes in an AI-rich environment. Findings will inform the design of case preparation, live discussion, assessment, and AI-use expectations while clarifying how case teaching can continue to foster independent analysis, managerial judgment, and defensible decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread availability of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has disrupted established approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment in higher education (Corbin et al., 2025; Mollick & Mollick, 2023). Although much of the discussion surrounding this disruption focuses on cheating (Dawson et al., 2024), the more consequential concern is that GenAI allows students to bypass the learning experiences needed to develop persistence and critical thinking (Bowen & Watson, 2024; Gerlich, 2025). These learning experiences often require students to work through uncertainty, frustration, and difficulty rather than immediately arrive at an answer. Such intellectual struggle is frequently the mechanism through which learning occurs, helping students develop the persistence associated with learning and long-term success (Andersson & Bergman, 2011; Bjork et al., 2011; Duckworth et al., 2007; Elizondo et al., 2024). The accessibility of GenAI therefore creates a difficult challenge for instructors seeking to integrate these tools while preserving the intellectual effort required for learning.

This challenge is especially salient in business and marketing education, where success depends on students engaging directly with ambiguity, analysis, and judgment. This paper seeks to develop a qualitative account of how case-based business and marketing education is changing, which practices support or undermine learning, and which elements should be preserved or redesigned. This inquiry is grounded in emerging evidence about the cognitive and educational consequences of overreliance on GenAI.

BACKGROUND

Although criticism of GenAI can seem fashionable, emerging research supports concerns about AI overuse and its effects on a multitude of negative impacts on learning outcomes such as deskilling; (Budzyń et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Shen & Tamkin, 2026); critical thinking (Gerlich, 2025); and neural connectivity and cognitive debt (Kosmyna et al., 2025). Even GenAI's short-term productivity gains may come at the expense of long-term skill development (Shen & Tamkin, 2026).

These concerns are consequential for assessment, which is intended to provide evidence of what students understand, how they reason, and where further development is needed (Shepard, 2005). Traditionally, instructors have been able to infer learning from artifacts such as essays, reports, presentations, and projects. Problematically, GenAI can produce polished artifacts that appear to demonstrate analysis, synthesis, judgment, and communication despite little underlying intellectual work (Dawson et al., 2024). This detriment to learning emerges through cognitive offloading, the use of external technology to reduce information processing and cognitive demand (Risko & Gilbert, 2016). GenAI's ubiquity and accessibility increase the likelihood and potential harm to learning experienced through cognitive offloading.

The ability to use GenAI responsibly is also becoming an essential workplace capability. Evidence from professional practice suggests an emerging divide between workers who use AI to extend their judgment and creativity and those who reproduce AI outputs without verification or critical analysis (CPA Practice Advisor, 2026). Because higher education helps shape the capabilities graduates bring into the workplace, business schools must prepare students to use AI productively while retaining the independent judgment needed to evaluate, revise, and defend its outputs. Students must learn to interpret ambiguous information, evaluate competing alternatives, make decisions under uncertainty, and defend recommendations (Nohria, 2021). These tasks require contextual judgment that develops through active analysis and repeated practice.

Case teaching may meet this need by preserving sustained analysis, making students' reasoning visible, and requiring them to defend decisions. Discussion-based cases develop judgment by placing students in complex situations where they must interpret evidence, evaluate alternatives, justify decisions, and apply concepts through preparation, questioning, listening, and debate (Christensen et al., 1991). Live discussion and follow-up questioning reveal reasoning more clearly than submitted artifacts alone.

Already, recent pedagogical research surrounding the case study method has shown that GenAI is changing how students prepare, participate, and complete case-related assessments (Weinstein, Brotspies & Gironda, 2025). This presents a need to understand how experienced case teachers are interpreting these changes, adapting their practices, and determining which elements of case-based learning should be preserved or redesigned.

METHODOLOGY

This study will use qualitative expert interviews to examine how highly recognized graduate business case teachers understand and respond to GenAI's effects on case-

based teaching and learning. Participants will be selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The initial sampling frame will include recipients of major recognitions, including The Case Centre awards and the North American Case Research Association Gold Medal. Public profiles, teaching biographies, and award information will confirm case-teaching experience, including pre-GenAI case teaching and continued teaching since 2022 or 2023. The sample will span marketing, finance, accounting, management, and entrepreneurship, with expert referrals identifying additional relevant participants.

Data will be collected through 45- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews. Questions will examine participants' purposes for using cases, practices before GenAI, perceived changes in student preparation, classroom discussion and assessment, adaptations to teaching, productive and concerning uses of GenAI, and views about what should be preserved or redesigned in case-teaching in the age of GenAI. Open-ended questions and follow-up probes will be used to invite concrete examples, including specific class sessions, assignments, or student interactions. Participants may consult syllabi, case-preparation instructions, assignments, AI policies, prompts, and teaching notes to support recall and ground responses in actual practice.

The study will initially target approximately 20 participants, with recruitment continuing until the central themes reach sufficient conceptual depth. Sample adequacy will be assessed iteratively based on the sample's specificity, information richness, variation, and whether additional interviews reveal meaningful new dimensions (Bouncken et al., 2026; Köhler, 2016).

Experienced case teachers will pilot the protocol to assess clarity, neutrality, sequencing, overlap, and its ability to elicit detailed examples. Their feedback will inform revisions before formal data collection.

Interviews will be coded inductively. Analytic memos will be written after each interview to document emerging patterns, notable incidents, and implications for subsequent interviews and sampling.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study is designed to produce an empirically grounded account of how GenAI is reshaping case-based business and marketing education. Findings will be organized around changes in pre-class preparation, classroom discussion, assessment, and the role of the instructor. Cross-case analysis will identify recurring teaching adaptations, productive and concerning forms of student AI-use, and the boundaries expert case teachers draw between legitimate assistance and the substitution of learning. The study will conclude by developing a set of principles for preserving the central learning purposes of case teaching while adapting the method to an AI-rich environment. These conclusions will clarify how case teaching can continue to foster independent analysis, managerial judgment, and defensible decision-making as GenAI becomes embedded in business and marketing education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

The study will extend case-teaching scholarship by explaining how GenAI alters the development of managerial judgment and the relationship between observable performance and underlying learning across preparation, discussion, and assessment.

It will also show how expert case teachers have experienced and responded to GenAI's classroom effects.

The findings will contribute to technology-enabled learning theory by distinguishing GenAI uses that augment reasoning from those that replace the cognitive effort needed for independent judgment and by identifying when established case-teaching practices remain effective or require redesign.

For practice, the study will guide the design of case preparation, live discussion, assessment, AI-use expectations, and opportunities for students to explain and defend their reasoning. It will also help instructors determine which elements should remain human-centered, where GenAI can support learning, and how their role may evolve.

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EARLY CAREER PREPARATION AND THE EXPERIENCE PARADOX: EXAMINING CAREER READINESS THROUGH SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

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ABSTRACT

The transition from higher education to the workforce has become increasingly challenging as employers continue to report concerns regarding graduate preparedness despite widespread labor shortages. This disconnect contributes to the “experience paradox,” whereby entry-level positions often require prior experience that students have not yet had the opportunity to acquire. Drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this study examines how structured career-readiness programming may enhance career self-efficacy, professional identity development, future-self clarity, and perceptions of career readiness. Preliminary findings from an ongoing mixed-methods study involving Career Growth Now participants suggest that experiential learning and direct engagement with hiring managers and industry professionals increase career confidence, career clarity, and perceptions of career success. The findings offer theoretical insights regarding the psychological mechanisms underlying career readiness while providing practical implications for educators seeking to better prepare students for successful workforce transitions.

INTRODUCTION

Despite increasing attention to workforce readiness, employers continue to express concerns regarding the preparedness of recent college graduates. Research suggests a growing disconnect between the competencies employers seek and the skills students believe they possess upon graduation (Damoah et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2025). Employers frequently identify deficiencies in professional communication, workplace readiness, initiative-taking, and practical experience, while students often report uncertainty regarding career pathways and employer expectations (Hegde & Kavade, 2025).

This disconnect contributes to what has been described as the experience paradox—the phenomenon whereby employers seek candidates with experience while many graduates struggle to obtain that experience before entering the workforce (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023; O’Brien et al., 2020; Orr et al., 2023). As a result, students often face challenges translating academic success into perceived workplace value. Higher education institutions have increasingly responded through experiential learning initiatives, internships, mentoring opportunities, and career-readiness programming (Hsu, 2025; Pereira et al., 2020). However, relatively little research has examined the

psychological mechanisms through which these interventions influence students' perceptions of employability and career preparedness.

BACKGROUND

This study draws on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which proposes that career development is shaped by self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, environmental influences, and goal-directed behaviors (Lent et al., 2002). According to SCCT, individuals are more likely to pursue career opportunities when they believe they can succeed and when they expect positive outcomes from their efforts. Environmental learning experiences play a critical role in shaping these beliefs (Lent & Brown, 2019; Wang et al., 2022). We argue that structured career-readiness interventions serve as important environmental learning experiences by exposing students to professionals, workplace norms, and career opportunities. These experiences may strengthen career self-efficacy and encourage greater engagement in career exploration and professional development activities.

The study further extends SCCT by incorporating professional identity development and future-self clarity. Exposure to hiring managers and industry professionals may help students envision themselves as future professionals and develop clearer career aspirations. Consistent with self-expansion theory, meaningful experiences and relationships can foster identity development and personal growth (Aron et al., 2003). Similarly, educational experiences emphasizing authenticity and reflection can help students develop stronger professional identities and greater confidence regarding future career pathways (Syrdal et al., 2023; Vander Schee et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This research represents the first phase of an ongoing mixed-methods investigation examining the effectiveness of Career Growth Now, a structured career-readiness program designed to bridge the gap between student preparation and employer expectations. The program combines experiential learning, professional development training, direct interaction with hiring managers and industry professionals, and guided reflection regarding career planning and workplace readiness. Data collection currently includes participant surveys, student reflections, and interviews with hiring managers and industry professionals. Additional data collection is underway, including measures of career self-efficacy, professional identity development, future-self clarity, and perceived career readiness.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Initial survey results suggest strong positive outcomes among program participants. 98% reported greater clarity regarding how to approach their careers. 93% reported increased confidence in managing their career development. 93% indicated improved perceptions of future career success. 81% reported experiencing tangible career-related success following participation.

Qualitative analysis of student reflections reveals several recurring themes. First, students frequently reported limited awareness of career pathways and workplace

expectations prior to participation. Second, students described increased confidence in pursuing professional opportunities after interacting with hiring managers and industry professionals. Third, students indicated that direct exposure to professionals reduced anxiety surrounding job searches and career decision-making.

Interviews with hiring managers revealed substantial agreement regarding challenges facing new graduates. Employers consistently emphasized concerns regarding professional communication, workplace readiness, initiative-taking, and self-management. At the same time, hiring managers highlighted the value of students who actively engage in career-development opportunities before graduation.

Collectively, these findings provide preliminary support for the proposition that structured career-readiness interventions influence student outcomes through increased career self-efficacy, expanded professional awareness, stronger professional identity development, and greater future-self clarity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

This study contributes to the growing literature on career readiness by applying Social Cognitive Career Theory to explain how experiential career-development interventions may influence workforce preparedness. Rather than viewing career readiness solely as the acquisition of technical skills, the findings suggest that confidence, professional identity, and future-self development may play important roles in helping students successfully navigate the transition from higher education to employment.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that career-readiness programs should move beyond résumé preparation and interviewing workshops to include meaningful interactions with hiring managers, experiential learning opportunities, and structured reflection activities. Such experiences appear to help students better understand professional expectations while increasing confidence and career clarity.

As this research progresses, future studies will examine these relationships more rigorously across multiple student populations and educational contexts. By identifying the mechanisms through which experiential career-readiness interventions influence student outcomes, this work offers both theoretical and practical insights for educators seeking to help students overcome the experience paradox and successfully launch professional careers.

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OWL! SUPPORTING ATTENTION IN MARKETING LECTURES

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ABSTRACT

Student disengagement is one of the most persistent challenges in large undergraduate marketing courses, particularly in introductory classes required for nonmajors. Many pedagogical innovations assume that students are already cognitively present and attending to instruction. This paper argues that attention should be treated as pedagogical infrastructure rather than a byproduct of effective teaching. Drawing on research in attention and cognitive engagement, it introduces a low-stakes classroom intervention—the Owl Game—designed to restore attentional presence during lecture-based instruction. Implemented across multiple large Principles of Marketing sections, the intervention creates brief attentional resets without consuming class time or imposing performance pressure. Student evaluation data suggest the Owl Game supports focus and increases perceived engagement: nearly a quarter of students spontaneously named the activity when asked what they would not want changed about the course. Implications for the presence-versus-learning engagement distinction and future comprehension research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators increasingly report that student disengagement—rather than conceptual difficulty—represents one of the most significant barriers to effective classroom instruction. Many students are physically present yet cognitively absent, distracted by personal devices, social media, and competing demands for attention (Dontre, 2020; Nema et al., 2023), a pattern intensified in the post-COVID-19 era by remote learning and increased screen exposure (Deng & Yang, 2025; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2024; Wiley, 2023).

Introductory Principles of Marketing courses face an additional constraint: as large, required courses populated largely by nonmajors (Lawrence, 2022; Sclarow et al., 2024), they often enroll students with limited motivation or identification with the discipline, in classrooms where boredom is a well-documented contributor to disengagement (Dugan et al., 2019). Instructors have responded with pedagogical innovations such as gamification and experiential exercises (Young, 2002; Grewal et al., 2025), but many of these strategies implicitly assume that students are already attending to instruction; when attention itself is compromised, even well-designed activities may fail.

This paper asserts that attention should be treated as a pedagogical prerequisite rather than an outcome of instructional design. To address this, the Owl Game was developed to create brief, recurring attentional resets during lecture-based instruction.

BACKGROUND

Attention is a finite cognitive resource and a necessary precondition for learning (Kahn, 1990). Attention during lectures is episodic rather than continuous, with frequent lapses that begin early in class and recur throughout (Bradbury, 2016), a pattern worsened by digital notifications, multitasking, and habitual device checking (Dontre, 2020; Lai & Bower, 2019; Tindell & Bohlander, 2012; Hasan et al., 2024).

Cognitive engagement—the mental effort students invest in learning—is closely tied to attentional control (Kaakinen et al., 2018; Rich et al., 2010). Engagement for *presence* differs from engagement for *learning*: presence-oriented engagement reflects alertness, awareness, and orientation to the classroom (Kahn, 1990), whereas learning-oriented engagement reflects cognitive processing of content—the layer most marketing education research targets. A student can be behaviorally compliant while cognitively absent, and no content-rich design compensates for a mind that has left the room. Presence-oriented engagement therefore functions as a structural precondition for learning-oriented engagement, not a lesser form of it (Rich et al., 2010; Trowler et al., 2022).

Low-stakes cues that interrupt disengagement may help students re-enter the learning process and support equitable participation, since they require nothing of a student's prior interest or content knowledge—only a moment's willingness to look up (Warren, 1992; Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009). The Owl Game was designed to operate exclusively at this level: it targets the precondition for engagement rather than engagement with the discipline itself.

METHODOLOGY

The Owl Game is a low-stakes engagement tool adapted from hidden-object puzzle games in which players search for a specific object embedded within complex visuals. In the classroom adaptation, one or more small owl images are discreetly embedded within PowerPoint lecture slides.

At the beginning of the semester, students are shown the owl image and told that owls will appear unpredictably during lectures. When a student spots one, they call out “Owl!” and the first to do so receives a small, non-academic reward—typically candy. No course credit, grades, or participation points are attached to the activity.

Owls start large and easy to find, then gradually shrink and become harder to detect as the semester progresses. One to three owls may appear per lecture, and finding all of them is neither required nor expected; interruptions typically total less than 90 seconds per class session.

The intervention was implemented across three semesters of large Principles of Marketing courses in lecture halls seating approximately 150–250 students. Ten sections participated, with enrollments ranging from 72 to 229 students. Data came from routine midterm and end-of-course evaluations that included open-ended questions about course experience and engagement; participation was voluntary and anonymous.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Student evaluation data consistently highlighted attention as a salient issue. Thirteen percent of respondents explicitly identified distraction or difficulty focusing—

describing “zoning out” or being “distracted on my phone”—as detrimental to their success (see Table 1), while 21% identified staying engaged as the factor most responsible for a positive classroom experience.

Asked what they would not want changed in the course, 23% of respondents named the Owl Game and another 15% referenced the class's overall engagement level—the two most frequent responses to that question (see Table 1). Comments frequently noted that searching for owls helped students stay focused and made class feel more interactive. End-of-course evaluations reinforced this: among students who answered what they liked most about the course, roughly 22% named the Owl Game explicitly, some offering nothing more than “Owls” or “Saying owl!” (see Table 2). Overall satisfaction also rose from midterm to end of course, though this shift cannot be attributed to the Owl Game alone.

Collectively, these results suggest the Owl Game functions as an effective attentional support, restoring cognitive presence without disrupting instructional flow. These findings speak to perceived engagement and presence rather than learning outcomes directly; whether the attention it recaptures translates into deeper processing of content is a distinct empirical question, taken up below.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

This paper contributes to marketing education by distinguishing attentional presence from content-based engagement and treating attention as pedagogical infrastructure. Prior engagement research has focused almost entirely on the learning-oriented layer, treating presence as an assumed baseline rather than something instructors can directly target; the Owl Game shows that presence-oriented engagement can be targeted independently, with measurable effects on students' self-reported focus. Because the activity is easily adaptable and independent of learning objectives or assessments, it can be implemented across courses and disciplines.

Limitations

Data were drawn from general course evaluation instruments rather than a survey purpose-built to isolate the Owl Game's effects, and no comparison sections without the game were available within the same semester, so the associations reported here are not causal.

Generalizability

These sections were large, lecture-based, and predominantly nonmajor—precisely where presence-oriented disengagement is most acute. The Owl Game likely translates readily to other large lecture courses regardless of discipline, since its mechanic depends on visual search rather than subject matter. Its value in smaller, upper-division, or online/hybrid settings is less certain, since it depends on real-time visual scanning and a public, spoken response; asynchronous adaptations would likely need a different mechanic.

Comprehension as a Future Direction

This study establishes that students perceive the Owl Game as supporting focus; it does not establish whether that attention improves comprehension or retention, arguably the most important open question this work raises. Future studies could

compare quiz performance between sessions with and without the game, or test within-session whether content introduced near an owl sighting is retained better. The broader literature on distraction and comprehension is mixed: a recent meta-analysis found digital distraction generally impairs comprehension, moderated by distraction type and study design (Shen, 2025), while brief, low-memory-load distractors leave comprehension largely intact, with costs emerging only under working-memory load (Luke & Jensen, 2023). Mild arousal from a distractor has even been linked to better performance on inference questions than silence (Elshafei et al., 2021). Because the Owl Game's mechanic—spot it, call it out, move on—resembles the low-cost distractors in this literature, its effect on comprehension may be neutral or positive rather than disruptive, though this remains untested.

Future work might also compare sections that use the Owl Game against matched sections that do not, using measures purpose-built for this question rather than general course evaluations. As attention becomes an increasingly scarce classroom resource, such interventions warrant continued scholarly attention.

Table 1

Sample of Midterm Responses to Open-Ended Evaluation Questions

Question	Top Responses	Illustrative Comments
What one thing would you not want to see changed in the course?	Owls (23%); Engagement level in class (15%); Guest speakers (11%)	"In-class owl activity." "I don't want to see the owl go away." "Calling out owl keeps people engaged."
What one thing have you done to make your experience positive?	Attending class (35%); Preparing for class (24%); Engaging / hunting owls (21%)	"Being locked in when the owl pops up." "Trying to find owls keeps me focused."
What one thing has been detrimental to your success?	Zoning out / distraction (13%); Not attending regularly (10%); Insufficient preparation (7%)	"Being distracted on my phone." "I get distracted in class because I am not engaged."

Table 2

Sample Illustrative Comments from End-of-Course Evaluations

Question	Selected Student Comments
What one thing did you like most about this course and instructor?	"I loved the owls." "She kept us engaged with the owls." "Owls." "Saying owl!" "Hunting owls."

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THE HYPOTHESIS-DRIVEN INDUSTRY VISIT: BRINGING TRUE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the Hypothesis-Driven Industry Visit, an experiential learning innovation developed from a teaching appointment at Harlaxton College, where every course required students to leave the classroom. Before visiting a real business, students submit five strategic questions with predicted answers, grounded in company-specific research; during the visit, they document actual responses; afterward, they write an analytical paper identifying the gap between prediction and reality and its strategic implications. Because each paper depends on a unique visit, it is difficult for artificial intelligence to replicate, and a required pre-AI draft preserves independent student thinking. Grounded in Kolb (1984) and Kolb and Kolb (2005), the framework restores the concrete-experience stage that simulations and case studies remove. Preliminary evidence from Harlaxton shows marked gains in student comprehension and engagement. A Culverhouse Pedagogical Enhancement Grant (PEG) will fund implementation in a Spring 2027 marketing strategy course, with two industry partners already secured.

INTRODUCTION

I have always been acutely aware that experiential learning is the best way for most students to learn. Having transitioned to academia after more than 20 years in industry, I endeavored to implement what I thought were real-world experiential projects into my pedagogy: simulations, case studies, projects with real clients, and guest speakers who told students what they would actually be doing once they graduated. Those activities are valuable, but they are not truly experiential learning, because in each case the real world is brought to the student rather than the student being sent to it.

BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

Kolb (1984) frames experiential learning as a cycle in which concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation build on one another; Kolb and Kolb (2005) extend this to argue that the learning environment itself, not just the activity, determines what is learned, and that positive engagement with material is often a precondition for learning rather than a byproduct of it. Most undergraduate marketing pedagogy substitutes simulation for this cycle, asking students to reflect on a fabricated experience rather than a lived one. The Hypothesis-Driven Industry Visit is designed to restore the concrete-experience stage that simulation removes.

METHODOLOGY

This innovation evolved from a teaching appointment at Harlaxton College in the UK in summer 2025, where every course, regardless of discipline, required students to leave the classroom and experience their subject in the real world. As a marketing class, we traveled to businesses across the UK: a candy production factory in York; the Cadbury chocolate factory in Birmingham, where we made our own chocolate bars; a museum of advertising history in London; an international printing company in Grantham; an open-air international market in London; and the National Railway Museum in York. At each location, students met with the business owner or a representative and were required to ask questions connecting the visit to course concepts. Tentative at first, students were asking questions like seasoned professionals by the second visit. After each visit, I conducted a comprehensive in-class debrief covering not only the questions we asked, but which questions we should have asked, and how that informed the questions we asked the next vendor.

This experience produced a replicable framework: the Hypothesis-Driven Industry Visit. Before each visit, students submit five strategic questions with predicted answers, supported by company-specific research and citations; questions answerable by a simple search are returned with a five-point penalty, compelling students to develop genuinely strategic inquiries that only the people in that room can answer. During the visit, students document actual responses. Afterward, they write an analytical paper comparing prediction to reality, identifying the gap between expected and actual answers and drawing strategic implications. Every paper is unique, and difficult—if not impossible—for AI to replicate, since it depends on a visit AI was not present for. A final layer requires students to submit a pre-AI draft before enhancing their paper with AI tools, making their own thinking visible and assessable independent of AI enhancement.

I have already secured two industry partners for these visits: QuantHub, a Birmingham, Alabama-based AI analytics firm eager to host students, whose own pedagogical frameworks align directly with the course's learning objectives; and the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Something unexpected happened at those Harlaxton visits. Debriefs became more sophisticated almost immediately, and the more businesses we visited, the more material my students seemed to comprehend. I was teaching the same Marketing Principles material I had taught for more than 20 years; the only variable introduced was the business visits. It came out in the debriefs that students were not only understanding the material better and faster, but wanted to, because they were seeing it in action, in real time. They prepared more diligently for each visit than for any other assignment.

Taking my students out for pizza one evening in London, they began peppering me, unprompted, with questions: What do you think their business model is? Who is their primary audience? What are the demographics of their average customer? Marketing Principles is a 300-level class, and these were MBA-level questions, off the clock. I did not expect that development. I had believed we would be bringing industry back into the classroom; in reality, we took the classroom out to industry. It is this transformation, from passive recipient to active strategic inquirer, that the Hypothesis-Driven Industry Visit is designed to replicate and amplify in a traditional semester. The University of

Alabama implementation launches Spring 2027; the Harlaxton pilot provides compelling preliminary evidence that the model works.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY OR PRACTICE

Any marketing educator can adopt this innovation with three elements: at least one willing industry partner, secured through a mutual value proposition of brand visibility for access; the Hypothesis-Driven Industry Visit framework, which is course-agnostic and adaptable to any business discipline; and a day-trip logistics model that eliminates overnight travel. I have received a Culverhouse Pedagogical Enhancement Grant to deploy an experiential 400-level Marketing Strategy course in Spring 2027 built on this model, including local and regional business visits, business speakers, and real-time analysis of operating businesses. These visits are not field trips; they are working collaborations where real, applied learning takes place. Part of my mission is to show other marketing educators, and educators in other disciplines, how they can not only implement this innovation but scale it to other sections and courses in their own colleges and universities.

The most significant logistical constraint is scheduling around a normal semester rather than a summer term, since students and instructors alike have other courses and larger class sizes complicate travel. Traveling on Fridays, when many colleges hold no classes; requiring attendance at only three of five scheduled visits; and providing a formal excuse for sanctioned, university-approved travel each mitigate this. Course approval should begin roughly a year in advance of the proposed start date, particularly for an Honors designation, since catalog changes require upper-level administrative approval and lead time. Working with the academic calendar, and avoiding Fridays before major weekend events, further reduces conflict.

How do I know true experiential learning works? Because I have already done it, and I have seen the results. The question is no longer whether students learn better when they leave the classroom. The question is how we design courses that make leaving possible.

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GROWING SUSTAINABILITY AWARENESS THROUGH A SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING SIMULATION

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ABSTRACT

Integrating sustainability knowledge in business education is no longer an option. Although business schools are adopting sustainability education, the content is often on the periphery. This research examines the integration of a semester-long sustainability simulation into a marketing management course. Preliminary results show engagement with the simulation throughout the semester led to depth learning of sustainability issues and a greater understanding of the role of marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is not a fad or an option, but an important strategy for businesses. Aside from the impact to consumers, communities, and society, adopting a sustainability framework has shown to be profitable and even give businesses a competitive advantage, helping companies outperform their competitors (Deloitte, 2025). Additionally, a 2026 report on the future of business education notes 75% of employers highlight sustainability education as very or extremely important in a business degree, yet only about 12% of students feel confidence in their knowledge to address sustainability issues (Ethier, 2026).

The growing importance of sustainability to businesses and consumers has led to an increased focus on sustainability education in business schools. AACSB calls on business schools to integrate sustainability education throughout the business curriculum. The addition of Societal Impact in the 2020 accreditation standards highlights the need for business schools to become leaders by aligning their initiatives with SDG goals (Steidle & Henderson, 2023). Given that 25% of university graduates engage in business education, it is vital that business schools adopt sustainability education as a foundation to all elements of business education (Bansal & Boyd, 2026).

Although business schools look to integrate sustainability into their curriculum, the adoption of sustainability focused courses remains a challenge due to issues such as size of the institution and resource constraints (Langen et al., 2024). Therefore, embedding sustainability into current marketing courses is a way to meet the needs of the market and prepare students for the future. Research shows efforts to integrate sustainability education can have minimal educational impact if sustainability issues are not instituted as core to business knowledge (Bansal & Boyd, 2026). This work looks to address this issue through a semester-long sustainability simulation which engages students into macro and micro sustainability issues, requiring students solve *complex* business problems which Bansal & Boyd (2026) note provides for greater depth in learning.

BACKGROUND

There is growing research on the integration of sustainability education in marketing courses. Delacroix (2024) found success through a craft-based experiential learning project to enhance depth learning of the SDGs. The project assigned in a sustainable marketing course gave students depth insight into SDG12, leading to transformative sustainability learning. Watson et al. (2022) integrated sustainability into an intro to marketing course by supplementing traditional marketing topics with a macro-sustainability perspective. In doing so, they saw an increase in students' awareness of sustainability issues and the impact of marketing on sustainability. Lastly, Manna et al. (2022) adopted a cross-course experiential learning project in collaboration with a local community organization to teach students about the triple bottom line framework. Using a design thinking foundation, the projects immersed students in the challenges of sustainability, giving them a greater understanding of the impact of sustainability on various stakeholders.

The previous research highlights the importance of integrating sustainability as a focal element in marketing courses, rather than as a peripheral piece such as a chapter. This work looks to add to the previous research by evaluating use of a sustainability simulation integrated throughout an introduction to marketing course to engage students in depth learning and understanding of sustainability issues beyond surface level understanding.

METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

The sustainability simulation was adopted in the undergraduate introductory marketing management courses. The use of this course was important since it is required for all business students, and thus a good entry point into sustainability for all business majors. Additionally, the course is designated as a part of a new cross-disciplinary sustainability degree, therefore students in the sustainability degree program can take the course as part of their degree.

The simulation adopted, The Green Business Lab, emphasizes the Triple Bottom Line framework. Students were split into teams of 6-7 and went through three rounds of decisions, one every three weeks. At completion of the simulation, each group submitted a report providing justification for their decisions in each round and conducted a presentation reporting on their strategy and results.

At the end of the course, the students were asked to fill out an optional survey regarding their experience. The survey contained quantitative and qualitative questions. The qualitative questions asked what they learned about marketing and sustainability by participating in the simulation and how participation in the simulation influenced their understanding of the role of marketers.

A preliminary evaluation of the open-ended showed the simulation increased student's knowledge of sustainability and understanding of the various factors that impact the triple bottom line. For example, one student stated *"I learned that marketing is not just about making money it also involves thinking about people and the environment and not just profit. The simulation showed me that businesses have to balance all three. And make decisions that can have some short term effects. Along with being able to see what decisions works and which ones don't."* Another comment noted *"The simulation taught me how marketing strategies can be aligned with Sustainable*

Development Goals (SDGs) and the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit). It showed me how to balance financial success with social and environmental responsibilities.”

Additionally, student comments highlighted an increase in their understanding of the role of marketing in sustainability. Comments specifically stated “*It helped me see that marketers do more than just promote products. They make decisions that can affect customers, and the environment. Marketers have to think carefully about their choices and try to balance making money with doing what’s right.*” and “*The simulation showed me that marketers play a key role in balancing business goals with social and environmental responsibility. They are responsible for communicating value, understanding customer needs, and making strategic decisions that affect brand perception and long-term success. It also made me realize that marketers must think critically about how their choices impact both the company and society.*”

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

Preliminary results show the detailed depth and engagement with the simulation led to greater learning depth beyond understanding the simplistic concepts of sustainability that most people are familiar with (save water, recycle, conserve resources, etc..). The simulation created a complex problem solving environment as recommended by Bansal and Boyd (2026) to make the content stick. Student comments highlight this depth learning of sustainability and their understanding of the role of marketing. Additionally, the simulation provided for experiential learning as seen with the use of case studies (Graul & Brocato, 2025).

Teaching sustainability creates leaders who are innovative and ready to tackle the continuous challenges that arise in building a sustainable future (Sharma, 2025). The use of the sustainability simulation is one way to bring these important concepts into the classroom to develop students who are prepared to lead companies into a sustainable future.

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STUDENT MOTIVATION IN MARKETING PRINCIPLES COURSES

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is transforming as universities respond to shifting student expectations by expanding flexible and online learning . Recent research has shown declines in student motivation, engagement, and performance, along with increased stress and self-regulation challenges in online learning. This study examines student motivation in online and face-to-face Marketing Principles using the MUSIC Model. Results showed high motivation across both modalities, with online students reporting significantly higher levels of empowerment. Findings provide implications for course design and student engagement in accelerated online marketing education.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is transforming as universities respond to shifting student expectations, financial pressures, and workforce demands by expanding flexible and online learning (Mintz, 2025). Online education has grown rapidly due to its accessibility, flexibility, and removal of travel and scheduling barriers, especially in asynchronous formats that support student autonomy (Kordrostami & Seitz, 2022). As students increasingly judge institutions by the quality of their online offerings, universities face growing pressure to strengthen online engagement and assessment practices (Bose & Ulrich, 2024).

Research has shown declines in student motivation, engagement, and performance, along with increased stress and self-regulation challenges in online learning (Corpus et al., 2022; Means et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2024). Because motivation is central to engagement and learning outcomes (Lei et al., 2024), supporting student motivation in online and accelerated learning environments has become increasingly important.

This study examines differences in student motivation between online and face-to-face Principles of Marketing courses using the MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation (Jones, 2009).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation provides a framework for understanding student engagement and motivation through five dimensions: eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Caring (Jones, 2009). The model has been widely applied in educational research to assess motivational perceptions that influence engagement and learning outcomes.

Principles of Marketing provides an appropriate context for examining motivation because it is often the first marketing course taken by students and is commonly offered in both face-to-face and online formats. As universities continue expanding online

offerings, understanding how course modality influences motivation has important implications for instructional design and student success.

Research following the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted increased challenges related to student motivation, self-regulation, and engagement in online learning environments (Corpus et al., 2022; Usher et al., 2024). Prior studies have also demonstrated that motivation significantly contributes to student engagement and learning effectiveness (Lei et al., 2024). Accordingly, evaluating motivation across online and face-to-face modalities may provide insight into how course structures influence students' learning experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation Inventory developed by Jones (2009) to assess differences in students' motivational profiles across online and face-to-face learning environments. Participants for this study were students enrolled in two sections of a Principles of Marketing course at a public university in the Midwestern United States during the spring semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. One section of Principles of Marketing was delivered in a traditional face-to-face format, while the other was offered fully online in an asynchronous format. Both sections were taught by the same instructor, used the same textbook and course materials, and followed an identical course schedule.

Students completed the MUSIC Inventory during the semester to assess perceptions of eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Caring using a 7-point Likert scale. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences between modalities for each MUSIC dimension.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, students reported high levels of motivation across all MUSIC dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 5.76 to 6.33 on the 7-point scale. Caring received the highest rating ($M = 6.33$, $SD = 0.64$), followed by Success ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 0.64$), Usefulness ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 0.81$), eMpowerment ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 0.76$), and Interest ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 0.82$).

To examine whether student motivation differed by course modality, independent-samples t-tests were conducted for each MUSIC dimension. Independent-samples t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference for eMpowerment, $t(58) = 2.11$, $p = .039$, $d = 0.55$. Online students reported significantly higher perceptions of empowerment ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 0.71$) compared to face-to-face students ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.78$). No statistically significant differences were observed for the remaining MUSIC dimensions.

For Caring, in-person students reported slightly higher scores ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 0.72$) than online students ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 0.55$), although the difference was not statistically significant, $t(58) = -1.63$, $p = .109$, $d = -0.42$. The small-to-medium effect size suggests a potentially meaningful difference in perceived instructor care across modalities; however, the study was underpowered to detect this effect with the current sample size ($N = 60$). Power analysis indicated that approximately 180 participants would be needed to achieve adequate statistical power (Cohen, 1988). Therefore, the non-significant

result should be interpreted cautiously, and the trend toward higher Caring scores among in-person students warrants further investigation in future research.

Overall, findings suggest that online and face-to-face students experience similar levels of motivation across most dimensions, with the primary difference emerging in eMpowerment, where the asynchronous online format appeared to afford students greater perceived autonomy and control over their learning process. These findings suggest that course modality may differentially influence specific components of student motivation while having minimal impact on others.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

The findings contribute to marketing education literature by providing a direct comparison of student motivation across online and face-to-face Principles of Marketing courses using the MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation. Results suggest that well-designed online courses can support similar levels of usefulness, success, interest, and caring as face-to-face courses while potentially enhancing students' perceptions of empowerment and autonomy.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer implications for the design of accelerated online marketing courses. Instructors and instructional designers should consider incorporating flexible learning structures, clear communication, and engaging activities that support autonomy and student engagement. Future research should continue examining motivational changes across modalities using larger sample sizes and additional business course contexts.

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TEACHING MARKETINTG RESEARCH WITH AI-ASSISTED REALISTIC PROJECTS (AARPS)

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ABSTRACT

Teaching undergraduate Marketing Research has its unique challenges. Expected to master both conceptual frameworks and technical skills in a disciplined, multi-stage process within constraints of time and resources, students often struggle with abstractness in course content and challenges in analytical tasks involving data preparation, analysis, and interpretation with adequate methodological rigor. Unlike more intuitive areas of marketing, Marketing Research demands comfort with ambiguity, critical thinking, statistical reasoning, and iterative processing of information. Additionally, undergraduate learners may lack the domain knowledge or professional context needed to appreciate the relevance of research decisions, making it difficult to fully engage with the learning material. To achieve student learning outcomes, hands-on experiential learning must be utilized to bridge the gaps between theory and practice while maintaining student motivation and confidence.

For decades, Marketing Research educators have advocated for incorporating client-sponsored projects or CSPs into undergraduate courses to boost student engagement through deep experiential learning (Humphreys, 1981; Lopez & Lee, 2005; Ramocki, 1987). CSPs require a company to sponsor or commission a group of students to complete a market research study in an area in which the company has a vested interest (Bove & Davies, 2009), potentially immersing students in real-world problem solving and fostering critical thinking, professional skills, and a stronger understanding of the research process in authentic business contexts. Despite its seemingly strong appeal, adoption of CSPs in undergraduate Marketing Research courses remains limited and uneven across programs with documented major hurdles (Bove & Davies, 2009; Yuksel et al., 2021) such as logistical constraints and inadequate client support.

Recent developments in Generative AI technologies may have the potential to transform the industry of marketing research with its increasing capabilities in automating data collection, accelerating analysis, and enabling the synthesis of large volumes of qualitative and quantitative information. Current and emerging AI capabilities can support current market research practices by making them faster, cheaper, and easier to scale up and/or replace current market research practices with new capabilities such as synthetic data and digital twins especially for early stages of market research (Brand et al., 2025; Korst et al., 2025). These capabilities are likely to not only reshape industry practices but also create opportunities for instructors to redesign classroom instruction, reducing barriers for student engagement with and participation in marketing research experiences.

Existing and emerging capabilities of Gen AI have captured the attention of marketing educators, as evidenced by the publication of a special issue in the *Journal of Marketing Education* in 2025. Scholars emphasize the need to integrate Gen AI into coursework, not only as a tool for efficiency but as a catalyst for rethinking skill development, ethics, and the future role of marketing researchers (Schlegelmilch &

Mills, 2025). Marketing courses must include hands-on experiences that integrate AI into every facet of the learning process (Grewal et al., 2025; Guha et al., 2024). In response to these calls, this paper attempts to propose a theory-anchored AARPs (AI-Assisted Realistic Projects) approach for Marketing Research instructors who value hands-on research experiences in student learning but need a more flexible and realistic alternative to the client-sponsored projects or CSPs approach.

The AARPs approach being realistic but not real has two distinctive features: 1) Projects are realistically designed to look into a real company facing a real problem situated in a real business context, requiring students to sustain their involvement with the same company moving along the holistic marketing research process (as in CSPs), instead of dealing with different companies in an isolated stage of the holistic marketing research process (unlike in case studies); and 2) Projects are not real – no logistics or client involvement is required (unlike in CSPs), thus saving time and energy otherwise required of instructors to secure committed support from clients – if available at all. The AARPs approach being AI-assisted but not AI-driven puts the instructor in charge, handpicking the company and its business context, the AI capabilities, the steps of the holistic marketing research process to prioritize for experiential learning, and guardrails necessary to build into its implementation.

A 7-step framework for implementing AARPs is briefly explained and demonstrated with the example of Southwest Airlines: 1) Identify a real company facing a real business problem in its real business context the research of which can successfully engage the interest of students taking the Marketing Research course; 2) Determine marketing research stages and concepts to be prioritized for experiential learning through hands-on activities and select the Gen AI capabilities that can be appropriately leveraged to solve tasks typical of the prioritized stages and concepts; 3) Develop (or choose from published sources) the desired number of assignments with clearly defined learning objectives, assessment tools with built-in guardrails for effective and ethical use of AI; 4) Monitor experiential learning progress and provide timely feedback to keep things moving forward in the right direction; 5) Evaluate student learning outcomes with assessment tools and provide feedback; 6) Summarize learning experience in the totality of the AARP projects; and 7) Identify opportunities for continuous improvement in the next cycle.

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ROOM TO RECOVER : PROGRESSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY IN MARKETING CO-CURRICULARS

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PANEL PAPER

THE RECRUITMENT GAP

Marketing programs often ask students to choose a major before they can describe the work marketers do. Admissions can introduce the degree, and courses can build knowledge, but a student may ask, “Could I do this work, and where could it take me?” Co-curricular participation can be a visible bridge in the recruitment ecosystem: from high school introduction to the marketing discipline to curricular design that facilitates deeper understanding to co-curricular invitation and finally to the rigor reality of the workplace.

Among 1,298 surveyed Gen Z early-career bachelor’s graduates, 71% of those who had participated in experiential learning said their degree was relevant to their job, versus 56% of nonparticipants; 49% versus 28% said their institution prepared them well for a career (Kahn & Patil, 2025). These observational comparisons span internships, research, and student work. They do not show that an American Marketing Association (AMA) chapter or client project causes students to declare marketing. They do show why a program should make the connection between learning and work visible.

WHY THE FIRST INVITATION MATTERS

A student might enjoy an introductory course yet assume that AMA or a case competition is for committed majors. Fees and uncertainty about one’s ability can reinforce that impression. If the invitation arrives after the student has chosen another major, the offering cannot help them explore marketing early. Programs must open the first step to students who have not yet decided that they belong.

Social cognitive career theory explains why that step matters: learning experiences, supports, and barriers shape self-efficacy, expected outcomes, interests, and academic choices (Lent et al., 1994). In a study of 608 marketing majors, faculty and other students influenced major choice, while specialized majors valued opportunities tied to their programs (Atkin et al., 2022). Students who already value such opportunities may also be more likely to participate

ACCOUNTABILITY WITH ROOM TO RECOVER

I propose a progression in which accountability and responsibility given to students increase as they move toward job readiness. A first-year student might attend an open AMA event and observe how practitioners frame a business problem. Next, a team might respond to a bounded brief and explain its recommendation to a faculty advisor. Students seeking greater responsibility could enter a case competition or join a

supervised insights and consulting project for a real organization. AMA chapters, mentorship, and competitions can support parts of this path (American Marketing Association, n.d.). This is a proposed design, not a claim that every element operates at my institution

The key is what happens between stages. In an exploratory activity, students can try a role with limited risk. In a team challenge, they must support a recommendation with evidence, meet a deadline, and respond to critique. In a client project, they must clarify the client's question, decide what evidence is sufficient, state the limits of their analysis, and deliver work another person can use. Faculty review protects both the learning process and the client relationship. An incomplete idea can be revised before it becomes a professional promise. Students experience real accountability, with room to recover from errors and understand why a different approach is needed

For example, students who learn a social media strategy framework in class could apply it outside class to a local business with its consent. An initial task might audit public social content and specify a research question. A later task might develop an audience insight, influencer rationale, or crisis response plan. Practitioner feedback would ask whether the proposed action is feasible, not simply whether it is polished. The student would save a revised brief, evidence of their contribution, and a short reflection in a portfolio. The portfolio makes the experience legible to a prospective employer and helps the student answer what a marketing degree can lead to.

A TESTABLE PROGRAM COMMITMENT

Recruitment requires more than offering activities. Admissions and introductory faculty should be able to name one open experience a student can try this term and the next opportunity it leads to. Programs should make the entry point accessible to undecided students and identify support for participation costs. A growing chapter is helpful, but a mature chapter is not a prerequisite for a first practitioner conversation or a supervised, bounded project. The aim is a path from initial awareness to participation, developing competence, and evidence of possible career direction.

Programs can track invitations, participation, portfolio work, major declarations, and later career outcomes. Counts cannot establish that participation caused those decisions; they can show where access breaks down or arrives too late. Before the end of a student's first year, can that student enter a marketing experience, try the work, accept critique, and decide whether to go further?

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FACULTY WELL-BEING INITIATIVES: FROM INDIVIDUAL RESOURCES TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

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PANEL PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Faculty well-being has become (or should become) an increasingly important issue within higher education institutions. Faculty members, who are a dedicated and accomplished group of individuals, remain integral assets to institutions, and are often left catering to the demands of multiple stakeholders (Halat et al., 2023). Faculty members are expected to balance teaching, research, service, student support and advising, administrative-type responsibilities, and professional development, all while navigating heightened productivity expectations and resource constraints. The old adage of doing more with less is increasingly becoming the norm. Research examining academic well-being consistently identifies workload, organizational pressures, work-life conflict, and inadequate institutional support as important contributors to stress and burnout (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025; Urbina-Garcia, 2020). These conditions have implications not only for individual faculty members but also for institutional effectiveness.

Higher education institutions have responded with a growing variety of faculty wellness initiatives, including employee assistance programs (EAPs), mental health resources, mindfulness programs, flexible work arrangements, professional development, and social support. However, an important question surfaces: Are institutions addressing the conditions that create faculty stress, or are they primarily helping employees cope with the conditions that already exist? Current literature was scoured on faculty well-being initiatives, and it is argued that sustainable approaches should combine individual wellness resources with organizational strategies that will overall improve the academic work environment. As Melnyk and Click (2024) state regarding investing in employee well-being: “it is not a nicety; it is a necessity that yields a positive return.”

BACKGROUND

Faculty Well-Being and Academic Burnout

Well-being is a broad concept that extends beyond the absence of stress or burnout. A recent systematic review of 161 studies found substantial variation in how faculty well-being is conceptualized and measured, with researchers frequently combining indicators such as burnout, stress, engagement, and other psychological outcomes (Iqbal Ruiz et al., 2025). A lack of consistency such as this suggests institutions should define well-being broadly when designing and evaluating initiatives.

The academic work environment itself presents several challenges to faculty well-being. A review of 60 studies involving more than 43,000 academic staff identified excessive workload, inadequate institutional support, and workplace conflict as important risk factors for burnout. In contrast, collegial support, participative leadership, and job satisfaction emerged as protective factors (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025). Similarly, a recent review of higher education professors identified workload, organizational problems, productivity pressure, and work-family conflict as recurring contributors to mental overload (de Aguiar Bandeira et al., 2026). These findings indicate faculty well-being is further shaped by organizational conditions.

Faculty Well-Being Initiatives

Research supports a variety of interventions designed to improve faculty well-being. A review of university lecturer burnout interventions identified social support and training among the most frequently studied approaches. Other positive strategies included supportive work environments, psychological capital interventions, work-life initiatives, and interventions designed to help faculty manage significant work demands (Cao et al., 2025).

Individual-level interventions can also be beneficial. Abraham et al. (2025) reviewed workplace-based mental health interventions for academic staff and found evidence supporting structured interventions such as mindfulness, yoga, lifestyle programs, community-based therapy, and institutionally-embedded wellness programs. Leadership support, peer networks, integration across the institution, and flexible delivery were identified as important factors of successful implementation.

Organizational Support

Consistent themes among the literature suggest that well-being initiatives are not the sole focus of the individuals, but rather a responsibility of all components of the academic career (Halat et al., 2023). In a review of 79 studies, Coats et al. (2024), identified higher education stressors including high job demands, low control, work-personal life imbalance, publication pressure, limited resources, and low perceived organizational support. The interventions identified in the review extended beyond traditional wellness programs to include flexible work arrangements, leadership development, greater transparency in decision-making, employee assistance programs, financial resources, and paid leave.

This distinction is important because an institution can offer extensive wellness resources while leaving the underlying sources of stress unchanged. Individual interventions may help faculty cope with demanding work, but organizational interventions can reduce or modify the demands themselves. Consequently, faculty well-being should be viewed as both individual and organizational responsibilities.

REVIEW

This paper was comprised of an integrative review of recent scholarly literature concerning faculty well-being, academic burnout, workplace stress, and higher education employee interventions. Emphasis was placed on systematic literature reviews, narrative reviews, and scholarly studies examining higher education faculty and academic staff. Recent literature was prioritized for discussion with common themes noted.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature indicates that faculty well-being initiatives are most promising when they operate at multiple levels. Individual interventions such as mindfulness, wellness programs, training, and social support can improve coping and psychological well-being. However, these approaches are unlikely to fully address faculty burnout when employees continue to experience excessive workloads, insufficient resources, low organizational support, or limited control over their work.

Three conclusions emerge from the literature. First, faculty well-being should be defined broadly rather than measured exclusively through burnout or mental health outcomes. Second, institutions should address organizational contributors to poor well-being, including workload, leadership, autonomy, work-life integration, and collegial relationships. Third, individual wellness resources remain valuable but should be integrated into a broader organizational strategy.

The strongest approach, therefore, is not to choose one or the other between individual and organizational interventions. In a perfect world, institutions should develop multilevel strategies that provide individual resources while simultaneously improving the organizational conditions in which faculty work.

IMPLICATIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

For higher education administrators, faculty well-being initiatives should begin identifying what is present, what is missing, what is working, and what needs improved. Melnyk and Click (2024) provide insight into the need for grassroots efforts in an effort to sustain a culture of wellness. Institutions could regularly assess workload, organizational support, leadership practices, work-life integration, and faculty perceptions of well-being before selecting or implementing additional interventions.

Ultimately, higher education administration should recognize that faculty well-being is influenced by everyday organizational management. Workload allocation, recognition, communication, empowerment, flexibility, and supportive leadership may be as important to well-being as formal wellness programming. Rather than treating wellness as an additional benefit offered to faculty, institutions should incorporate well-being into organizational policies and everyday practices.

Faculty well-being initiatives are most likely to produce sustainable outcomes when they move beyond helping faculty cope with challenging conditions and begin addressing the underlying issues themselves. A comprehensive approach that combines individual support with organizational change offers higher education institutions a more meaningful path toward the intended outcome.

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP ROLE: A REVIEW OF TWO PROGRAMS FROM NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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PANEL PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Faculty members typically prepare extensively for careers in teaching and scholarship, yet many receive comparatively little preparation for academic leadership. Moving into a department chair, school director, or other administrative role can fundamentally change the nature of a faculty member's work. At Northern Illinois University (NIU), a department chair or school director is designated the chief academic and administrative officer of the unit and is accountable to the dean for its operation and development. Responsibilities encompass budgets, curriculum, personnel, resources, strategic direction, staff supervision, faculty workloads, and the overall effectiveness of the academic unit.

How, then, should faculty prepare for such a transition? Two leadership-development initiatives at NIU, developed through the Provost's Office—the Emerging Faculty Leaders Program (EFLP) and Department Leaders Initiative (DLI)—illustrate complementary approaches. One develops faculty before they assume formal leadership positions; the other supports academic leaders after they enter those roles. Together, the experiences suggest that academic leadership development is best viewed as a continuum rather than a one-time training event.

PREPARING BEFORE THE ROLE: EMERGING FACULTY LEADERS PROGRAM (EFLP)

The Emerging Faculty Leaders Program (EFLP) is an intensive professional-development experience designed for faculty interested in expanding their capacity for leadership in higher education. Its objectives emphasize leadership self-awareness, diversity and inclusion, development of a supportive peer and leadership network, and creation of an individual professional-development plan.

The academic year-long program in the past few years began with an important distinction: management versus leadership. Participants then explored their personality, values, personal mission, goals, and potential academic leadership careers. Subsequent sessions moved progressively toward the practical realities of leadership, including building strong teams, understanding human-resource processes, considering unit culture, and exploring leadership opportunities at the department, college, and university levels.

During the spring, participants examined financial management, philanthropy and fundraising, leadership communications, crisis management, social media, and strategic planning. Senior university administrators and experienced academic leaders participated throughout the program, giving emerging leaders access to perspectives

beyond their home departments. Participants were also encouraged to observe university governance firsthand by attending meetings such as the Board of Trustees, Faculty Senate, University Council, or leadership-search forums.

The EFLP model suggests that preparation for academic leadership should begin before accepting an administrative appointment. Faculty can use this period to determine whether leadership is consistent with their values and goals, understand how the institution operates, develop relationships beyond their discipline, and begin acquiring competencies that differ from those traditionally rewarded in faculty careers. In fact, one great outcome of a training program might be that a faculty member determines that an administrative role is NOT for them. That will help both the faculty member and the institution, in that a “wrong” appointment is avoided.

DEVELOPING AFTER THE ROLE: DEPARTMENT LEADERS INITIATIVE (DLI)

The Department Leaders Initiative was developed to address a different stage of the leadership journey: faculty already serving as department chairs, school directors, and other unit leaders. The program emphasized practical leadership challenges and opportunities for leaders to learn from peers confronting similar situations.

A survey of department leaders helped identify the breadth of the role. Respondents rated representing and advocating for the department particularly high ($M = 4.88$ on a five-point scale), followed by maintaining a productive work climate and representing faculty to administration (both $M = 4.71$). Developing long-range vision and departmental goals and mediating conflict were also highly rated (both $M = 4.63$).

These priorities informed a series of sessions addressing how to manage difficult faculty, engaging external communities, strategic planning and goal setting, faculty workload and burnout, maintaining or restarting one's research agenda, and compassionate leadership. Leaders also identified concerns such as conflict resolution, low morale, advocacy, maintaining research productivity, student recruitment, and burnout.

The DLI experience also revealed an important lesson about developing people who are already in leadership positions: ***their time is extremely scarce***. Participants valued meeting other chairs, hearing colleagues' experiences, discussing common problems, and learning from peers. At the same time, some questioned the value of lengthy or duplicative training sessions and expressed difficulty adding additional meetings to already demanding schedules. Program recommendations consequently included having more informal peer discussion that is programmed into sessions, greater differentiation among types of leaders, and flexibility in scheduling and delivery of the training sessions.

LESSONS FOR PREPARING ACADEMIC LEADERS

Taken together, the two initiatives suggest several principles for faculty considering academic leadership and institutions seeking to prepare them.

Begin Before the Appointment

Leadership development should not begin on the first day someone becomes a chair. Faculty benefit from opportunities to explore their motivations, values, leadership style, and career goals before deciding whether administration is the right path.

Understand the Actual Job

Academic leadership extends well beyond faculty governance and curriculum. Chairs are responsible for budgets, people, resources, conflict, strategy, advocacy, and organizational change. NIU's expectations illustrate how dramatically the scope of responsibility expands when a faculty member assumes leadership. Again, making sure a faculty member learns about the breadth of the work in pre-administrative training will inform them as to whether or not the role is a right one to enter.

Learn the Institution

Effective academic leaders need to understand governance, finance, human resources, advancement, communications, and the relationships among departments, colleges, and central administration. Exposure to these functions before assuming leadership can reduce the learning curve afterward.

Develop Relationships Before They Are Needed

Both programs demonstrate the importance of networks. Emerging leaders benefit from access to experienced administrators, while current chairs particularly value relationships with peers who understand the challenges of the position.

Continue Development After Accepting the Role

Preparation cannot anticipate every difficult faculty situation, budget problem, conflict, or organizational challenge. Once faculty become administrators, leadership development should shift toward timely problem solving, peer consultation, mentoring, and practical application.

CONCLUSION

Academic leadership requires faculty to move from individual accomplishment toward responsibility for the success of others and the performance of an academic unit. The experiences of EFLP and DLI suggest that universities can make this transition more intentional. Faculty should have opportunities to explore leadership before accepting a position, understand what the work entails, build institutional knowledge and networks, and receive continued support once they assume the role. Preparing academic leaders, therefore, is less an event than a developmental process—one that begins well before the appointment and continues throughout the leadership journey.

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COLLABORATING ACROSS DISCIPLINES

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PANEL PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Higher education faces challenging times ahead with the demographic cliff significantly decreasing the number of incoming traditional college students, limited government funding to support academic programs, negative media coverage questioning the value of a degree, and rising competition to train the next generation of professionals in the workforce (Clark et al., 2026). To get through these challenging times, higher education institutions must find ways to leverage skillsets across their disciplines to provide value to their key stakeholders including students through unique program offerings, research using novel approaches to solve problems, and working collaboratively to give back through service activities. These collaborative approaches utilizing expertise across disciplines can help convey a stronger value proposition to members of society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Across the three pillars in higher education (teaching, research, and service), there are opportunities for scholars to collaborate with peers across disciplines to add value to their institutions and provide unique learning experiences for their students. Team projects can be opportunities for courses to assess student communication and teamwork skills. With employers seeking out soft skills through written and oral communication (Robles, 2012), students can develop these skills as well as gain experience with conflict resolution as they work in teams towards a common goal in the course. One area that instructors can tap into is collaborating across courses where student teams from different classes and majors can work together towards a common goal. This allows students to still develop their skills and competences related to the courses they are taking but additionally work with a diverse team like the workforce where professionals work in groups with others from different departments in the organization towards a common goal.

Regarding research, we are seeing a push towards more interdisciplinary collaboration. This has expanded in recent years with some researchers moving from an interdisciplinary approach to more of a transdisciplinary approach. This consists of researchers working collaboratively from different fields to solve real-world problems. Transdisciplinary work goes beyond academic knowledge to include more stakeholders and remove the boundaries between disciplines completely utilizing a more holistic framework when taking on research questions (Wickson et al., 2006). This new approach has the potential to help researchers address complex problems in the marketplace today leveraging a more diverse group of researchers. Through this holistic framework, new insights can be gathered to further our understanding of the world around us.

Service work at the university and external from the university can benefit from collaborations across disciplines. This includes collaborations to design academic programs that are a blend of disciplines to provide students with a more diverse skillset to ensure a higher likelihood of success in their future professional careers. Departments can also work collaboratively with one another to give back to the campus community and make a larger impact by leveraging the diverse skills of the faculty, staff, and students from a variety of programs.

CONCLUSION

To help foster these collaborations, higher education institutions need to reward academics and provide them with opportunities to work with scholars from other disciplines. This includes providing faculty with networking opportunities so they can get outside of their silos, connect with other faculty from across the university, brainstorm future collaborations, and implement them within the institution. Faculty networking events can have a positive impact on the university (Blair et al., 2024b). Offering some type of monetary compensation or course releases for successful collaborations could help incentivize interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborations. With many full-time faculty experiencing negative perceptions in the workplace (Blair et al., 2024a), finding ways to reduce employer burnout through leveraging synergies across departments could be beneficial for higher education institutions.

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP ROLE: WHEN PREPARATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY!

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PANEL PAPER

Preparing to serve in any academic leadership role requires a holistic approach to advancing the overall student experience while also understanding the overarching academic ecosystem. Any successful approach should be grounded in a clear understanding of student needs and expectations, informed by data and emerging trends in higher education, and aligned with the distinctive strengths and opportunities of the people within the College and campus as well as external stakeholders.

In a newly created College level administrative position, with a specific mandate to increase face-to-face undergraduate enrollment while simultaneously strengthening engagement for face-to-face and online undergraduate students, leadership should first aim to help create an environment in which every student, regardless of program, background, or modality, experiences a strong sense of belonging, receives meaningful support, recognizes the value of the educational experience, and is prepared to achieve academic and professional success. In short, one of the most meaningful approaches to preparing for an inaugural academic role is to become the type of curious learner that we would like our students to be. The necessary preparation ‘homework’ must at a minimum involve engaging in thorough data gathering and supported analysis, developing a detailed plan of action, and utilizing teamwork to accomplish goals.

The first and perhaps most important phase related to data requires developing a thorough understanding of what the job requires and the context within which it is set. Approaching the role from a 360-degree vantage point allows for understanding what the role requires within the College as outlined in a job description but also clarifies the overarching strategic relevance of the role to the institution. Secondly, any administrator moving into academic leadership should become so familiar with data driven decision making that it becomes an integral part of their toolkit. Prior to assuming any leadership role, especially for newly created academic positions, it is important to grapple with a wide array of questions that will need to be addressed repeatedly throughout one’s time in academic leadership. Broadly speaking, gaining an understanding of “What is happening with our students, why is it happening, and what are we going to do about it?” are just a few items on the list of extensive questions to be addressed. In short, adopting a data driven approach using key indicators ensures that effectively navigating an academic leadership role will rest not only on reporting numbers, but also using numbers to drive decision making.

After setting the foundation by relying on data to drive understanding of and decision making within the role, it is integral to develop a detailed plan of action. A great starting point is to think through and map out the specifics of how to strengthen the College’s value proposition. In the current job context, increasing face-to-face enrollment and improving engagement should begin with being able to clearly articulate

why a student should choose my College of Business over another institution. In planning for my administrative leadership role, I realized that it was not only important to keep the value proposition in mind, but it was perhaps more important that students could understand it, see it for themselves and feel that it was within their reach in a reasonable amount of time. So, planning included initiatives like prioritizing career focused outcomes, experiential learning built into courses to bridge technical and practical learning, and access to business leaders and alumni networks both on and off campus. As an example, the Career Vine initiative I developed prior to beginning the administrative leadership role was a faculty-driven and community supported mechanism for incorporating a common thread of career focused content into most of the courses over time. This could include employer projects, mentoring, networking, business competitions, executive speakers, and career coaching – directly built into the coursework across the curriculum. Making career readiness central to students' experience is one of the strongest ways to build a strong value proposition as there becomes a clear connection for students from the classroom directly to their future careers.

A major theme emerging from higher education currently is that student success is not created by a single administrative office, however the onus is still on administrators to lead the charge by building a shared culture of ownership. As with any leadership role, the people are central to the endeavor, and incoming leadership must keep this consideration at the forefront. Effective administrative leadership requires communication and collaboration, accountability, and a willingness to evaluate and improve. In building an effective team, it is also important to solicit feedback from constituents and familiarize yourself with their needs as a trust building mechanism. For new administrative leaders, it is important to recognize that the role requires the skill of orchestrating an ecosystem and translating workplace challenges into a collective institutional opportunity. Thorough preparation must involve a well-developed strategy for mobilizing faculty, staff, and external stakeholders toward a shared vision and mission. The overall mandate for the success of the College cannot be the responsibility of administrators alone but leading the charge to create efficient, effective and high quality teams will ensure that academic leaders have the support that they need to accomplish their goals. Though organizational and relational barriers can make team building difficult, the right leader can also competently navigate these hurdles whenever they arise.

By prioritizing data driven decision making, developing a detailed plan to strengthen the overall value proposition, and aligning people and partnerships around shared goals, administrative leaders who are transitioning into new roles can undoubtedly set themselves up for success and position their College for sustainable long-term growth.

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INTEGRATING CERTIFICATIONS INTO COURSEWORK

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PANEL PAPER

Over the past two decades, utilization of third-party certifications in marketing classes has proliferated for several reasons. **First**, the industry is moving faster than textbooks and faculty can keep up. Certification credentials typically are good for only one year, at which point the material in many such programs is updated to the current standard. **Second**, many of the most popular marketing vendors offer free certifications that students can complete outside of precious classroom time. **Third**, these certifications have proven to enhance students' resumes, eligibility for internships, and post-graduate employability.

In this panel, four professors who use marketing certifications successfully will discuss which certifications they recommend, how they integrate these credentials into their classes, and how students perceive the results. A compilation of some relevant certifications, their methodology and time commitment, and their cost (most students clearly prefer free) will be provided as well.

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GENERATIVE AI AND CREATIVE STRATEGY

Elizabeth Carey, Roger Williams University

PANEL PAPER

This panel presentation (one of four presentations) explores the use of certifications for alleviating fear when learning how to use AI in the context of a creative advertising course. The newly developed course titled *Generative AI and Creative Strategy* was designed after a three semester longitudinal study surveying students on their perceptions of using generative AI for creative assignments. The course combined industry-recognized micro-credentials with a semester-long experiential branding project. Students completed certifications through the Google Skills Path Generative AI Leader program and three LinkedIn Learning courses that focused heavily on how to integrated GEN AI into the creative and conceiving process. Students received historical and technical insight on LLMs, and how they are structured and built to serve the AI agents today, like ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, Co-Pilot, etc. Students then applied these concepts to perform generative and agentic AI tasks while developing a new brand identity for a mocktail beverage. The session shares pedagogical frameworks, examples of student work, and qualitative findings from an end-of-semester focus group detailing student attitudes toward AI in creative assignments. Attendees will gain actionable strategies for balancing technical micro-credentials with human-centric creative execution.

PANEL TOPIC IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE

The rapid rise of generative AI transforms the advertising and marketing landscape, requiring educators to rethink creative strategy frameworks. Employers increasingly look for entry level job candidates who understand AI workflows and possess verified technical skills with insight as to how to develop creative concepts with both AI and human input. This panel addresses a critical gap in marketing education: how to teach students to co-create with AI without sacrificing core creative principles. By sharing an active model that blends structured Skill Path course work and micro-credentials with open-ended brand and product development, this session provides marketing educators with a scalable blueprint for AI curriculum integration.

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HOW TO GET STARTED LEADING STUDY ABROAD TRIPS

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PANEL PAPER

There are countless professors who have led many more trips than me. However, if you are reading this paper then you are probably not one of them! Therefore, we will focus on those professors who are new to leading a study abroad trip, and on the fence about going, which is the same position I was in at this time of the semester just a couple of years ago.

The first step is to identify key issues and then find others to work with to obtain the information and support necessary to overcome whatever obstacles you may be facing. Some of the most common obstacles you may face are inexperience, the uncertainty whether enough students will sign up, budgeting and high trip costs, and risks of potential emergencies and liability. Yet by recognizing and addressing these roadblocks you can take the next steps in working through whatever the reasons for hesitancy may be. If the answer is not now, then you can still work towards laying the foundations for a future excursion.

One of the simplest pieces of advice – perhaps too late for me to implement but which you can still learn from – gleaned from a colleague was to start small. In his case, the study away trip was rather to a large U.S. city where he already had multiple strong connections. Remaining stateside cut down tremendously on the cost and logistics of planning a study abroad trip. For instance, driving may be an option instead of flying depending on the chosen location. This avoids the hassle of passports, immunizations, and other requirements.

A second benefit of starting out with what you know is that it helps establish direction. If you have a desire in your heart to lead a study abroad trip and are not sure where to go, then considering where your own contacts are and what you are already familiar with can help guide your discernment, narrowing down the options and perhaps even leading to an easy choice with the greatest odds of success. A shorter trip also provides a great stepping stone to later leading the spectacular international study abroad experience you dreamt of. Trust me, you can get there, but maybe not all at once. Like other things in life, there is nothing wrong with starting out slow and building your way up rather than going all out and swinging for the fences in hopes of hitting a home run on your first time up to bat.

One of the most intimidating aspects of leading a study abroad trip may be planning the course content. While this can seem overwhelming, especially amid teaching and all the other duties we have, it can turn out to be one of the most fun and exhilarating aspects of the entire program. Often the biggest challenge is simply getting started. In short, leading a study abroad trip gives professors a unique opportunity to really dive into an area of personal interest they can enjoy learning more about before ultimately experiencing it with others. Sharing all that excitement and new knowledge with students, especially if creating a new study abroad course when permitted by the

institution, may offer additional freedom and flexibility in course design compared to traditional semester long courses. For example, online history and travel videos can be used to help with building excitement among students and convey initial lessons about a particular area long before visiting there.

Additionally, the new knowledge that leading a study abroad trip offers does not have to end when the course is over. Rather, it should leave students and teachers refreshed and re-invigorated when they return to classes at home as well. One of the overlooked benefits is how study abroad can deepen the student-teacher bond and give students and teachers a new perspective about their roles. Seeing the human side of students and them seeing the same about their teachers helps foster greater understanding between the groups as well. Furthermore, simply spending that much time together in the matter of days and weeks instead of semesters can create lasting friendships among the students too.

Admittedly, it took a lot of urging from a colleague to co-lead my first study abroad trip but now I am glad that I did. In fact, I have already begun thinking about planning the next trip soon – either together again or perhaps on my own this time – but I cannot overstate the importance of finding a willing accomplice for your study abroad adventure. Whether this person travels with you or not, having a person on board who has gone through the ropes before to bounce ideas around with makes all the difference. Moreover, when doubt arises, you will have another reason to consider what you – and of course your students! – would be missing out on by not taking that leap of faith to make a study abroad trip happen.

Finally, keep in mind too that you will still have challenges along the way, but that is just the means of gaining experience. If you are like me you should wind up with some pretty funny stories afterwards about the adventures and challenges encountered along the way – things we can laugh at now even if they were not as funny at the time – and those stories just add to the intrigue and great memories of the study abroad trip as time passes.

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DON'T FORGET THE MAIL: TEACHING STUDENTS TO INCORPORATE DIRECT MAIL INTO THEIR MARKETING SKILL SET

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PANEL PAPER

Contemporary undergraduate marketing curricula frequently prioritize digital communication channels, including social media, search engine optimization, and email marketing, while physical mail is often mischaracterized by both students and educators as an outdated promotional medium. This perception warrants critical reassessment. Rather than positioning direct mail as an isolated or obsolete tactic, marketing educators should present it as an integral component of an omnichannel marketing strategy. Incorporating direct mail into marketing pedagogy enables students to bridge theoretical concepts with practical application, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of integrated marketing communications. Moreover, the study of direct mail encourages students to engage critically with concepts such as consumer psychology, sensory branding, and the tangible dimensions of the customer journey. These concepts, which are often obscured within predominantly digital environments, become more accessible and meaningful when examined through the lens of physical marketing interactions. In fact, neuromarketing research (Venkatraman et al., 2015), discovered that physical advertisements leave a significantly deeper, more lasting emotional footprint in the human brain than digital ads, regardless of consumer age.

Despite the continued prominence of digital media, direct mail remains a highly effective marketing channel, often generating response rates that warrant its inclusion in contemporary marketing instruction. Consequently, marketing curricula should equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate physical mail with digital communications through a "phygital" marketing approach. Such integration reflects the realities of modern consumer engagement, where customers interact with brands across multiple interconnected touchpoints. This position paper argues that direct mail should be reconceptualized and taught not as an obsolete marketing artifact, but as a premium, data-driven component of contemporary omnichannel marketing strategy. This can be achieved through course assignments and projects that require students to utilize a physical mailer that incorporates digital features such as QR codes, Personalized URLs (PURLs), Augmented Reality (AR), and Near-Field Communication (NFC) (United States Postal Service, n.d.). These artifacts can become useful tools in the skill set of marketing students.

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2026 MARKETING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION FALL EDUCATORS CONFERENCE STRENGTHENING THE ANNUAL TEACHING PORTFOLIO: COURSE LEADERSHIP AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Jane Lee Saber, Toronto Metropolitan University

PANEL PAPER

INTRODUCTION

The path to tenure is a critical journey for junior faculty. While research productivity often dominates tenure preparation, teaching also remains a foundational pillar, typically accounting for 30% to 80% of the evaluation depending on the institution (Alshare et al., 2007; AACSB International, 2021; Kansas State University, 2023). Given this significant weight, developing a robust annual teaching portfolio is crucial. However, many untenured faculty treat portfolios as a defensive, "check-the-box" exercise, relying almost exclusively on standard student evaluations and basic peer observations. While necessary, these traditional metrics are insufficient to distinguish a candidate as a pedagogical leader. Grounded in the author's work as a former department Chair, service as a tenure committee member, and consultations with peer evaluators, this paper proposes that course leadership and innovative curriculum design, including the timely, forward-looking integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, strengthen teaching portfolios and tenure cases.

BEYOND THE STANDARD PORTFOLIO: COURSE AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

In many institutions, the teaching portfolio is a standard requirement in tenure dossiers. Unfortunately, rather than heeding the suggestions of the guidelines from Georgia Institute of Technology (2024) and Lafayette College (2019) that explicitly value course development, curriculum revision, and classroom innovation, many junior faculty construct portfolios consisting only of student evaluation scores, peer evaluations, a teaching philosophy, and basic syllabi. While these aspects are necessary, they fail to optimize the potential pedagogical excellence of a candidate. Without additional evidence, junior faculty may appear to treat teaching as a routine, prescribed function and thus deny themselves the opportunity to demonstrate the scholarly dimensions of pedagogical advancements: as Boyer (1990) suggests, teaching is a form of scholarship requiring deep knowledge, intellectual engagement, and the capacity to transform ideas (see also Wendling, 2020). In order to prevent the suboptimized development and recognition of their pedagogical talent, junior faculty could seek out and successfully deploy course leadership and curriculum development activities to strengthen their annual and tenure application portfolios.

Specifically, these activities demonstrate pedagogical initiative through designing new courses, revising existing ones, serving on curriculum committees, piloting innovative methods (e.g., flipped classrooms), or leading accreditation mapping. These activities generate concrete, documentable artifacts, such as revised syllabi, rubrics, and course proposals, that integrate seamlessly into the teaching portfolio. More importantly, they demonstrate that the faculty member thinks systematically about how students learn, how courses fit within a broader curriculum, and how pedagogical choices connect to educational outcomes.

Seldin, Miller, and Seldin (2010) emphasize that effective portfolios must document steps taken to improve teaching, aligning with Felten's (2013) principles of good practice in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Curriculum development work does this by showing that the candidate is actively shaping the educational environment rather than merely delivering content. Furthermore, course leadership positions the faculty member as a collegial contributor, bridging teaching and service.

Beyond these foundational activities, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools into curriculum development represents a particularly timely and forward-looking dimension of this strategy. Generative AI platforms can assist faculty in drafting learning outcomes, developing rubrics, generating case studies, and mapping course content. With 86% of students using AI (Digital Education Council, 2024) and institutions rapidly establishing formal guidance (UNESCO, 2025), faculty who demonstrate AI literacy signal adaptability and forward-thinking pedagogy. Crucially, AI use should be framed not as a shortcut but as a scholarly tool; documenting how AI-generated materials were evaluated, refined, and adapted demonstrates the critical, reflective practice that tenure committees value. Each of these AI-assisted activities, when presented thoughtfully, becomes a powerful and distinctive portfolio artifact in its own right.

FOUR POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COURSE AND CURRICULAR LEADERSHIP

These activities do not go unnoticed in tenure deliberations. Based on the author's experience as a former AACSB-accredited department Chair and consultations with eight former chairs and twelve committee members, course and curricular leadership enhances teaching portfolios across four main dimensions.

First, course and curricular leadership signals authentic interest. Evaluation committee members noted that when a candidate's portfolio includes curriculum development work, it communicates that the faculty member's engagement with teaching is genuine rather than perfunctory. One former chair observed that while almost anyone can secure decent student evaluations, the development of a new course or redesigning a curriculum shows that a candidate actually cares about the educational mission.

Second, these activities enhance peer evaluations. Multiple colleagues confirmed that course leadership provides context that elevates peer teaching evaluations. When a peer reviewer can note that the candidate developed the course being observed, or that the pedagogical approach reflects a deliberate curricular innovation, the evaluation carries additional weight.

Third, course leadership demonstrates pedagogical thinking. Evaluation committee members consistently valued evidence that candidates think systematically about how students learn. Curriculum development requires faculty to articulate

learning outcomes, align assessments with objectives, sequence content deliberately, and consider how individual courses contribute to program-level goals. This kind of thinking, reflecting what Hutchings and Shulman (1999) might call "teaching as community property," is precisely what tenure committees tend to value and emphasize in tenure decisions.

Fourth, the experience itself is developmental. Several colleagues noted that beyond its portfolio value, curriculum development work gives untenured faculty genuinely useful experience in preparing course materials, thinking about student cognition, and engaging with pedagogical literature. This developmental benefit tends to create an iterative, reinforcing positivity cycle: the faculty member becomes a better teacher through the process, which in turn generates better teaching evaluations and more compelling portfolio evidence, which can further encourage faculty to continue with their efforts and commitment to optimized teaching. Taken together, these four dimensions make a compelling case, but only if junior faculty know how to act on them. The following recommendations are offered to junior or tenure-track faculty seeking to optimize their annual and tenure-preparation teaching portfolios:

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 1

Recommendations for Strengthening the Teaching Portfolio Through Course Leadership

Recommendation	Description
Seek opportunities early	Begin identifying curriculum development opportunities in your first or second year.
Document systematically	Maintain a file of both products (syllabi, rubrics) and processes (committee notes, reflective memos).
Connect to student outcomes	Gather evidence of improved learning, such as pre/post assessments or qualitative feedback.
Integrate AI tools thoughtfully	Use AI as a collaborator, but document how you critically evaluated, refined, and adapted its outputs.
Communicate with your chair	Discuss your interests early so your chair can direct you to opportunities and advocate for you.
Frame work in your teaching statement	Explicitly reference curriculum activities in your teaching philosophy, connecting them to broader pedagogical goals.

While these recommendations span different stages of the pre-tenure timeline, their collective goal is to shift the portfolio narrative from passive instruction to active leadership. Implementing these strategic steps allows candidates to systematically build, showcase, and ultimately secure recognition for their pedagogical leadership.

CONCLUSION

While research productivity remains crucial, the teaching portfolio offers a genuine opportunity to demonstrate excellence beyond standard evaluations. Course leadership and curriculum development provide compelling, documentable evidence of pedagogical commitment, intellectual engagement, and collegial contribution. The experienced evaluators consulted here agree that these activities matter. They signal authentic interest, enhance peer evaluations, and demonstrate systematic pedagogical thinking. When combined with the thoughtful, scholarly integration of AI tools, an increasingly valued and visible competency, curricular development positions junior faculty as committed, forward-thinking educators invested in both student success and their own professional growth. The question is not whether junior faculty can afford to pursue course and curriculum leadership; rather, it is whether they can afford not to.

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BUILDING A RECRUITMENT ECOSYSTEM FOR MARKETING PROGRAMS

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PANEL PAPER

Marketing programs often approach recruitment as a front-end activity: attract prospective students, communicate the value of the major, and convert interest into enrollment. I propose a broader perspective. Recruitment should be understood as an ecosystem that begins with awareness but continues through engagement, retention, professional development, career transition, and ultimately student and alumni advocacy.

This perspective changes the central recruitment question. Rather than asking only, “How do we get more students into the major?” programs should ask, “What experiences make students want to enter, remain in, succeed in, and advocate for the program?” Recruitment and retention become connected rather than separate functions. Each stage of the student experience either strengthens or weakens the credibility of the program’s promise. The most useful organizing question is the one prospective student already ask: “What can I do with a marketing degree?” A recruitment ecosystem should make the answer visible long before graduation.

Introductory marketing courses are often the first sustained encounter students have with the discipline. They should therefore be treated as recruitment opportunities, particularly for students who enter college without a clear understanding of what marketing work actually involves. The goal is not to turn the course into a sales pitch for the major. Instead, the course should make the breadth of marketing visible. Students should encounter brand strategy, consumer insights, digital marketing, research, sales, analytics, social media, international marketing, product management, and other career pathways through assignments, examples, guest speakers, and career conversations. When students can connect course concepts to recognizable professional roles, the major becomes more concrete. Introductory courses can also serve as the first point of connection to the broader marketing community. Faculty can invite students to American Marketing Association events, introduce professional certifications, share internship opportunities, and highlight upper-level experiential courses. In this way, the introductory course becomes the entrance to a pathway rather than an isolated requirement.

Student organizations such as the American Marketing Association can serve as recruitment engines because they allow students to experience marketing as an identity and community, not simply as a set of courses. AMA chapters can intentionally welcome non-majors, students who are considering marketing, and students enrolled in introductory courses. The organization can make the discipline visible through agency tours, employer panels, alumni conversations, competitions, workshops, portfolio reviews, and peer mentoring. Current students become especially important messengers. A prospective marketing major may value faculty information, but seeing another student present client work, describe an internship, earn a certification, or

secure a job creates a different form of credibility. Students can see themselves in the pathway. Experiential learning should not remain hidden inside upper-level classrooms. Agency projects, consulting engagements, simulations, internships, research projects, and client presentations can become highly visible evidence of what students actually do in a marketing program. For example, a simulated agency environment can position students as strategy associates who work in teams, respond to client asks, analyze evidence, develop recommendations, and defend their decisions. The same experience that develops strategic competence can also communicate the value of the program to prospective students. Finished work can be showcased at student events, admitted-student programs, social media, advisory board meetings, and employer gatherings.

The recruitment message changes from “we offer experiential learning” to “this is what our students are doing.” That distinction matters. Visible artifacts, client presentations, student portfolios, and professional experiences make the promise of the curriculum tangible. Marketing programs also need stronger systems for telling student success stories. Career outcomes should not be reserved for annual reports or accreditation documents. Internship placements, first jobs, promotions, certifications, competition results, consulting projects, and alumni career trajectories should become part of the program’s ongoing narrative. Industry partnerships strengthen that narrative. Advisory boards, guest speakers, employer projects, internships, mentoring, agency visits, and recruiting relationships allow students to see a line between coursework and professional opportunity. These partnerships also help programs stay responsive to changing skills and career expectations.

Importantly, recruitment messaging should not rely only on broad claims about employability. Students want examples. What jobs are available? What does a brand strategist do? Where do graduates work? What skills will students develop? What experiences will they have before graduation? Who will they meet? The clearer the pathway, the easier it becomes for students to imagine themselves moving through it.

The final stage of the ecosystem is advocacy. Students who have experienced a coherent pathway can become some of a program’s most persuasive recruiters. They can speak in introductory classes, participate in prospective-student events, mentor newer majors, share internships and projects through social media, and tell authentic stories about their professional development. This creates a reinforcing loop: prospective students observe current students succeeding; new students enter and engage; engaged students participate in organizations and experiential learning; those experiences support retention and career development; successful students and alumni then become visible advocates for the next group. A recruitment ecosystem therefore does not end when a student declares marketing as a major. Declaration is one conversion point within a much longer relationship. Building this ecosystem does not necessarily require a large recruitment budget. It requires coordination. Faculty, introductory courses, student organizations, career services, alumni, industry partners, experiential projects, and program communications should reinforce the same pathway.

The program should be able to show a student: here is what marketing is; here is where you can belong; here is what you will learn; here is what you will do; here are the professionals you will meet; here are the careers graduates enter; and here is how you can eventually help the next student see the same possibilities.

Recruitment is strongest when the marketing program itself becomes the evidence for its promise. A connected ecosystem makes the value proposition visible

across the entire student journey and turns recruitment from a periodic campaign into an ongoing outcome of a strong program experience.

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CREATING VALUE FROM CAMPUS TO COMMUNITY: A MACRO–MESO–MICRO FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL MARKETING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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PANEL PAPER

VALUE CREATION AS THE CONNECTING LOGIC

Local marketing and community engagement are often described as experiential learning, service, outreach, or applied scholarship. Those labels are useful, but they can also fragment work that is better understood as part of a single value-creation system. This discusses a macro–meso–micro framework in which local engagement creates value at three interconnected levels. At the macro level, it provides visible evidence that higher education remains relevant to students, employers, and regions. At the meso level, it builds the institutional and relational infrastructure through which universities, accreditors, intermediaries, and community partners coordinate resources. At the micro level, it converts community questions into decisions, student learning, and scholarly outputs. The central management challenge is therefore not simply to “do” community engagement, but to design it so that value is reciprocal, measurable, and repeatable.

MACRO LEVEL: REASSERTING HIGHER EDUCATION’S VALUE

The macro context makes the value question increasingly difficult to avoid. WICHE projects that the number of U.S. high school graduates will decline 13% from its 2025 peak by 2041 (Lane et al., 2024). At the same time, the transition from college to work is strained: only 30% of 2025 graduates reported securing full-time work in their field, while 48% felt unprepared even to apply for entry-level roles (Cengage Group, 2025). Employers likewise identify skills gaps as a primary constraint on organizational transformation (World Economic Forum, 2025). These pressures intensify public scrutiny of what students and communities receive in exchange for their investment in higher education.

Local engagement offers one concrete response because it makes institutional value observable. Rather than working solely on simulations or published cases, students work on problems that are of direct consequence and importance to local stakeholders. During this process, community organizations receive research, marketing strategy, creative work, or implementation support while the university reputation is buoyed by providing tangible and visible evidence that faculty expertise and student development can improve regional economic productivity and progress. Carnegie’s community-engagement framework emphasizes reciprocity and mutually beneficial exchange. Yet, the elective classification remains concentrated among a subset of institutions (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching & American Council on Education, 2026). For regional and smaller institutions especially, deliberate

local engagement can therefore function as both mission fulfillment and differentiation. Macro-level value is created when the institution can credibly show that it is producing capable graduates while strengthening the place it serves.

MESO LEVEL: BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

Macro-level promises are only durable when they are supported by meso-level structures. Chambers of commerce, economic development centers, local business associations, Small Business Development Centers, incubators, and individual firms can serve as translators between community need and academic capacity. Their value is not simply access to “clients.” Effective partners commit time, share sufficient information, remain responsive, provide candid feedback, and take student work seriously enough to use it when appropriate. Reciprocity is essential: the community cannot be treated as a laboratory for university objectives, nor can students be viewed as “free labor” for cash-strapped businesses and community organizations.

This middle layer also includes entities that shape institutional incentives. AACSB has elevated societal impact as an accreditation expectation, with Standard 9 explicitly linking stakeholder engagement to positive, mission-aligned societal impact (AACSB International, 2020). Alignment with this standard helps justify support and adjusted evaluation metrics that move community engagement from optional service toward evidence that supports accreditation, strategic planning, teaching, scholarship, and external relations simultaneously. In other words, the same work can create value for multiple institutional stakeholders when outcomes are built into evaluation models, incentivized, and documented for reporting, rather than merely counted as activity.

The more difficult meso-level partnership is often internal. Faculty may experience engaged projects as additional workload on top of existing teaching, research, and service demands, particularly when promotion and tenure systems provide weak recognition (Bloomgarden & O’Meara, 2007; Hou, 2010). Administrative support must therefore address course structures, compensation or resources, degree applicability, and recognition of engaged scholarship. Faculty buy-in improves when projects align with disciplinary expertise, roles are explicit, workloads are manageable, and teaching, research, and engagement can be integrated rather than treated as competing obligations.

MICRO LEVEL: OPERATIONALIZING VALUE CREATION

At the micro level, value is produced through the creation of replicable operational structures that account for the recurring challenges of student work and semester timelines. The panel examples illustrate three complementary models: an interdisciplinary small-business practicum, a student-run marketing agency, and an applied research center. The practicum uses a small cross-disciplinary cohort and multiple faculty specialties to develop solutions for local businesses. Highland Road Marketing organizes students as an agency with its own brand, advisory board, website, service portfolio, and recurring community clients. The applied research center model uses a “Local Insight Loop” that moves from a community question to a campus team, evidence development, and strategic action. Despite different structures, all three models replace one-way service with co-production.

Several operational practices make that co-production more reliable. Projects should pass clear gates for decision relevance, feasibility, learning value, and scholarship potential. Partners should receive staged deliverables (i.e. a discovery brief, midpoint readout, decision-oriented final presentation, and after-action capture) rather than waiting for an end-of-the-semester binder. One accountable faculty member or center should own the partner relationship, while flexible student and faculty teams change by project. Shared templates, MOUs, data-storage protocols, quality standards, and documented handoffs reduce the cost of constantly starting over.

That continuity architecture matters because semester calendars and graduating students create unavoidable churn. Community relationships cannot live primarily in a student's inbox or memory. The institutional "hub" must preserve context, decisions, data, and next steps so a new cohort can enter without forcing the partner to restart the relationship. Scopes should also be calibrated to the rhythm of academic calendars: promise only what can be completed well within a semester, identify work that must extend to a future team, and use after-action documentation to create the next project rather than an abrupt ending.

Finally, measurement and documentation should be captured so that it adds value across the spectrum of the implementing faculty member's responsibilities. Project closeout should capture partner impact such as decisions made, programs changed, audiences reached, or resources saved (societal impact); student impact such as research competencies, portfolio evidence, presentations, and career clarity; and scholarly impact such as data sets, cases, conference papers, and publications. Those micro-level outcomes can then be aggregated into meso-level evidence for accreditation and institutional planning and, ultimately, into a macro-level story of public value.

CONCLUSION

The strongest case for local marketing and community engagement is not that it is a novel pedagogy, but rather that it creates a connected chain of value. Micro-level projects create usable decisions, career-ready experience, and scholarly possibilities. Meso-level partners and institutional systems make those outcomes sustainable, accessible, and visible. Aggregated over time, those outcomes become macro-level evidence that higher education creates value beyond the campus boundary. In an environment where enrollment, workforce readiness, and public confidence are under pressure, local engagement gives institutions a practical way to demonstrate their relevance and develop influential community advocates.

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BUILDING CAREER-READY MARKETERS THROUGH A STUDENT-RUN AGENCY

Patrick Lynch, Lyon College

PANEL PAPER

ABSTRACT

Employers consistently report that marketing graduates lack the soft skills, such as client communication, teamwork, and adaptive problem-solving, that hiring managers value alongside technical proficiency. This paper examines the student-run digital marketing agency as an experiential learning model well suited to closing that gap. Drawing on a case example of a stand-alone, credit-bearing agency embedded in an undergraduate marketing curriculum, together with published survey and client-outcome data from a comparable program, the paper argues that ongoing, multi-semester client relationships build soft skills more effectively than certifications, simulations, or single-semester projects. Students in agency-based programs rate client interaction and teamwork above technical skills such as SEO and analytics as their most valued outcomes, and report increased confidence in seeking and performing digital marketing roles. Client testimonials further demonstrate the measurable business value student teams deliver. The report discusses implications for marketing educators and institutions considering an agency-based model of experiential learning.

THE GAP EMPLOYERS KEEP NAMING

Every marketing educator has heard some version of the same complaint from employers: graduates arrive with strong theoretical knowledge but limited ability to apply it under real conditions. An analysis of 320 digital marketing job postings found that three of the five most-requested qualifications — communication, analytical problem-solving, and creativity — are soft skills rather than technical ones, even in a field defined by its tools and platforms (Elhajjar, 2022). A parallel study of Hungarian job advertisements reached the same conclusion (Kovacs & Vamosi Zarandne, 2022). The lecture hall suits teaching SEO mechanics, the four Ps, or segmentation frameworks. It is far less suited to teaching a student how to sit across from a nervous small-business owner and defend a recommendation.

Experiential learning is meant to close this gap, and the format matters more than the label. Gruen, Niman, and Chagnon (2024) offer a useful comparison of the options available to a marketing curriculum: certifications (e.g., HubSpot), micro-internships (e.g., Forage), simulations, semester-long client projects, and full consultancies. Each adds a layer of realism, but each also plateaus. Certifications teach a tool, not a client relationship. Projects run one semester and end when the grade posts. What consistently produces the deepest soft-skill development — teamwork, client

management, initiative, and the ability to recover when a plan goes sideways — is the student-run agency model, where the client is not a simulation and the relationship does not end at finals week.

A Working Example: Highland Road Marketing at Lyon College

This is not a hypothetical. Highland Road Marketing (HRM), a student-run digital marketing agency at Lyon College, launched as a special topics course with 21 students and has since become a permanent, catalog-listed course, BUS 404. In its first year, the student team built a brand identity, an SEO-optimized website, and working relationships with two local clients: WebFlex and the local Humane Society. The client pipeline has since grown to include the Batesville Area Arts Council and the Batesville Chamber of Commerce, with additional clients waiting on enrollment capacity.

What makes HRM instructive for other institutions is not that it is unusual — it is that it diverges, in one important respect, from a pattern documented across the country. Boston University's PRLab, the nation's oldest student-run communications agency (founded 1978), the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Jacht Agency, the University of Oregon's Allen Hall Advertising, and Suffolk University's Suffolk in the Hub have each moved toward or been founded as freestanding, university-affiliated nonprofit enterprises, a structure that lets them draw participants from across their schools and operate outside the enrollment limits of a single course. Lyon College considered a comparable path for HRM, but has instead found continued success keeping the agency structured as a single credit-bearing course housed within the marketing curriculum. Enrollment, client volume, and revenue have each grown steadily under this simpler model, and a single faculty advisor has been able to sustain the client pipeline, oversight, and academic integration that peer institutions typically distribute across a governing board, administrative liaison, and student executive team. For an institution of Lyon's size, remaining course-based has preserved the soft-skill outcomes associated with the agency model while avoiding the added governance, compliance, and stipend-administration burden that a nonprofit structure requires.

That continuity, not the organizational form around it, is the real mechanism. Gruen et al. (2024) found that agencies with ongoing, multi-semester client relationships generate more soft-skill development than single-semester projects or simulations precisely because students experience the consequences of their own recommendations over time. A social media calendar built in September gets tested against real engagement data in November. A student who advised a client in the fall may be managing that same account, with more responsibility, the following spring — continuity that HRM has achieved within, rather than outside, the standard course structure.

What Students Actually Gain

The value of an agency experience is not evenly distributed across hard and soft skills, and the data are worth taking seriously rather than assuming. In their survey of agency students and alumni, Gruen et al. (2024) asked participants to rate, on a four-point scale, how much they hoped to develop eight specific job-related skills. The two highest-rated items — working with clients ($M = 3.85$) and working in an agency environment ($M = 3.71$) — were both soft skills. Developing teamwork skills followed closely ($M = 3.53$). Technical skills such as SEO and analytics rated lowest, at 2.78 each.

Students consistently valued the interpersonal, client-facing dimension of the work over the tool proficiency that traditionally dominates a digital marketing syllabus.

The confidence data tell a similar story. Fifty-five current and former agency members reported strong agreement that the experience prepared them to work at a digital marketing agency ($M = 3.61$ of 4) and increased their confidence in applying for digital marketing positions ($M = 3.71$). One respondent reported that all of their full-time job opportunities came directly from their agency experience, noting that employers were consistently interested in hearing about client-facing work (Gruen et al., 2024). That is precisely the signal a résumé line about coursework cannot send. A finished audit, a live campaign, and a client willing to serve as a reference are portfolio artifacts an employer can evaluate directly, rather than trusting a transcript to indicate readiness.

What Employers Actually Get

The employer side of the equation is not incidental. One early client of a comparable student-run agency, a retailer of weighted comfort products, reported that the exposure from the student engagement helped it land accounts with two additional Whole Foods locations. A separate outdoor-clothing client credited the agency's digital audit for its decision to hire a social media coordinator and a part-time photographer (Gruen et al., 2024). HRM's own client roster — WebFlex, the local Humane Society, the Batesville Area Arts Council, and the Batesville Chamber of Commerce — reflects the same dynamic on a smaller scale: local organizations receiving marketing work they could not otherwise afford, delivered by students for whom the account is often their first client-facing engagement.

That combination — a business receiving real value at a price point it can afford, and a student building a verifiable body of work — is what separates the agency model from every other experiential option. Certifications and simulations cannot generate a testimonial. Only a live client can.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS CONSIDERING THIS MODEL

Any institution weighing this path should expect real challenges: faculty who have never worked inside an agency, client-sourcing that takes trial and error, and financing questions that never fully disappear even when the model is designed to be revenue-neutral. Peer institutions have generally addressed these challenges by formalizing their agencies as nonprofit enterprises, which allows broader student participation and a dedicated governance structure but also adds legal review, board oversight, and stipend administration. Lyon College's experience with HRM suggests a second, lighter-weight path: a single credit-bearing course, advised by one faculty member, can sustain client relationships, revenue growth, and soft-skill outcomes comparable to those reported in larger agency models, without the institutional overhead a nonprofit conversion requires. The right structure likely depends on institution size and ambition — a nonprofit model may be warranted where cross-disciplinary participation is a priority, while a course-based model may better fit institutions seeking the same outcomes with a smaller administrative footprint.

The broader lesson is straightforward. Community partnerships — through a chamber of commerce, a small business development center, or direct outreach — are not an enrichment activity layered onto the marketing curriculum. When structured as an ongoing agency relationship rather than a single project, they become the

curriculum's most effective mechanism for producing the soft skills employers say they cannot find, while giving local businesses a genuine return on their willingness to work with students.

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HANDS-ON ENGAGEMENT: SUSTAINABLE HIGH-SCHOOL RECRUITMENT

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SPECIAL SESSION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Many business schools face persistent difficulty attracting high-school students who have limited exposure to campus life and limited awareness of business majors. Traditional recruitment events such as campus tours or classroom visits often produce low yield because they lack a compelling academic experience that demonstrates the nature of business study. The Annual Holley Business Ethics, Business Applications, and Entrepreneurship Sales Case Competitions were created to address this gap by combining skill application with an immersive campus visit.

The program is sponsored through the Bertrand P. Holley Distinguished Professor of Business Ethics endowment and is hosted by the School of Business within the Lumpkin College of Business and Technology. From the outset the organizers deliberately engaged a wide set of institutional partners. Campus facilities staff secure classrooms and auditorium space in The School of Business. Dining services provide dedicated dining areas and coordinated lunch service. Faculty colleagues and community professionals serve as judges. Student organizations supply volunteers for registration, timing, and technology support. These partnerships keep the event free for participating schools and students while creating a professional atmosphere that high-school visitors associate with the university.

The remainder of the paper details the preparatory systems, day-of logistics, and the structure of the three competition divisions. It then reports participation growth and operational lessons and closes with practical implications for other institutions seeking to replicate the approach.

METHODOLOGY

The competition operates as a single-day, on-campus event with three simultaneous divisions. The methodology is presented in three complementary strands that correspond to the roles of the organizers: preparatory infrastructure, day-of execution, and division design.

PREPARATORY WORK

Preparatory work begins months in advance. High-school outreach lists are maintained and expanded each year. Returning schools receive priority pre-registration so that capacity can be managed predictably. New schools are invited through direct

email, counselor networks, and business-teacher associations. Registration is collected through a Microsoft Form that captures school contact information, anticipated team numbers, and later the final roster with t-shirt sizes. Digital parking passes are issued in advance for passenger vehicles; school buses use a designated lot without passes.

Campus partners are confirmed early: classroom and auditorium reservations, dining-hall coordination, and technology checks. Judges are recruited from faculty, alumni, and local business professionals. Student volunteers are trained for registration, room monitoring, and scoring support. All participant communications emphasize business-casual dress, team-size limits of two to four students, and free admission for all schools.

DAY-OF LOGISTICS

The 2026 itinerary illustrates the operational pattern. Registration opens at 8:45 a.m. in The School of Business, where teams receive name tags, team color assignments, presentation schedules, lunch menus, and university merchandise. A brief welcome and orientation occurs in the auditorium at 9:15 a.m. Competition rounds run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. across multiple classrooms throughout the School. Lunch follows in the dining halls, where high-school students, teachers, faculty, and judges sit together. Awards are presented at 1:15 p.m., and teams depart by 2:00 p.m.

Real-time problem solving is built into the plan. Backup rooms, spare computer adapters, and business students staffing the check-in table allow rapid response to technology or schedule issues. Team colors and pre-printed itineraries reduce confusion during simultaneous rounds. Light refreshments are available near registration to keep the morning flow smooth.

DIVISION DESIGN

Business Ethics Division

Teams receive a short, current-events ethics case at the start of the competition and have one hour to analyze it and prepare a presentation. No advanced preparation is required. Each team delivers an uninterrupted presentation of at most eight minutes followed by five minutes of judge questions. Judging criteria include delivery, depth of analysis, persuasiveness, creativity, recommendations that are both ethical and practical, and quality of responses to questions. The 2026 case examined ethical issues surrounding a proposed state tax on unrealized capital gains of high-net-worth individuals, using a hypothetical modeled on a high-profile corporate collapse.

Business Applications Division

Teams act as business analysts for a fictional outdoor retailer with four store locations. Using a supplied three-month dataset, they complete an Excel workbook that requires formula-based calculations of total revenue, gross profit, average inventory, inventory turnover, and marketing efficiency. They also produce a written report in Word and a PowerPoint presentation. All deliverables must be finished by a hard midday deadline. The tasks emphasize accurate formula construction, professional formatting, and clear managerial recommendations.

Entrepreneurial Sales Division

In the current format teams function as athletic marketing agents. They select one or more university student-athletes from a provided spreadsheet that includes actual social-media profiles, identify realistic business partners for Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) agreements, and present a financially grounded partnership proposal to judges acting as agency decision-makers. Evaluation focuses on brand fit, strategic logic, credibility, and execution rather than pure promotional flair. Earlier iterations of the division used crowdsourced product selection and a live pitch to a major retailer; the structure continues to evolve in response to participant feedback and emerging professional contexts.

FINDINGS

Participation approximately doubled in each of the first three years. In the fourth year the event reached the physical capacity of available classrooms and generated a waiting list. Nearly every school that has competed has returned in subsequent years. About a dozen students have competed in all four of their eligible years. Winning teams receive medals, trophies, and EIU scholarships contingent on future enrollment, creating a direct recruitment incentive.

Operational lessons have been consistent. Pre-registration for returning schools stabilizes planning. Simultaneous rather than sequential divisions keep the event to a single day and maximize the sense of energy on campus. Live tasks, rather than work completed in advance, maintain fairness, engagement, and excitement on the day of competition rather than making the event an added homework assignment. Institutional partners across facilities, dining, faculty, and student volunteers are indispensable; without them the cost and complexity would exceed the capacity of a single academic unit. Continuous collection of teacher and student feedback has driven refinements such as the shift to on-site ethics cases and the redesign of the sales division around current professional practices and the expansion of the event to include an AI-based accounting division for the 2027 iteration.

DISCUSSION

The competition model demonstrates that a carefully designed one-day event can serve dual purposes: skill development for high-school students and measurable recruitment for the host institution. Other colleges can adapt the blueprint by starting with one or two divisions, securing the same categories of campus partners, and attaching modest scholarships or other tangible incentives to awards. Sample timelines, registration forms, room-assignment systems, and judging rubrics can be shared directly with interested colleagues.

Future work should track the yield of competition participants into actual university enrollment and major declaration. As of yet, approximately sixteen student competitors have enrolled at the university. Additional research could examine measured gains in ethical reasoning, analytical skill, or sales confidence. Hybrid or virtual formats may extend reach to schools that cannot travel, although the campus-visit component remains central to the recruitment effect. The organizers welcome collaboration with other institutions interested in testing or refining the model.

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No external sources are cited. This paper draws exclusively on program records and operational experience of the Annual Holley Business Competitions at Eastern Illinois University.

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LEGAL UPDATES IN MARKETING AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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SPECIAL SESSION PAPER

In addition to my experience with business and marketing, I have a background in law as a practicing attorney. Therefore, I am familiar with many legal education conferences and training which include annual updates on Supreme Court cases, state laws or other topics. Lawyers commonly give presentations on the most important legal court decisions and new laws on a wide variety of topics for other businesses and organizations. Accordingly, the aim of this special session is to do the same here – that is, to provide a helpful background and offer a brief update on some the most interesting legal cases and laws affecting marketers.

As the theme of the conference involves artificial intelligence, that will be a primary part of the focus area here. Also, since this is the first year this proposal has been submitted and accepted, it seems appropriate to begin with a deeper background than future sessions might offer. While this is a far cry from a full business law course, there is still much to learn about the current situation from the history of the law relating to innovative technologies. A couple of key areas that greatly impact marketers include generative AI and copyright matters. Active marketers may have already heard about some of these such as the ongoing Anthropic and Midjourney cases. However, there remains room for and a need for further explanation to nonlawyer marketers, with a secondary focus additionally on how marketing professors can raise awareness of legal considerations in the classroom.

As an additional background consideration, it is interesting and important to consider first how the futuristic element of the evolution of new technology is that those who are considered leading or ‘cutting edge’ companies and products sometimes skirt the line in terms of copyrights and technical regulations. While occasionally this ends up costing them significantly, and we can all think of examples, often it is also the price of admission. Evidence of this are some of the claims made between early computer manufacturers and programmers such as Microsoft and IBM, a fascinating history available for further research, including how they may have allegedly borrowed or stolen parts of code from one another.

These big tech companies of course emerged and remain successful in the computer industry, and while they and others have been fined at times the examples of a technology being shut down such as Napster because it violated copyright and related laws are rare. Interestingly, the recording companies also chose to sue some individual users for copyright violations, rather than just the enabling companies and platforms themselves. In contrast, today there are numerous legal music and video streaming services available.

Another relevant example is ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft that run afoul of different local taxicab rules and regulations in local areas. While traveling to Greece for a study-abroad trip last summer I experienced this personally where Lyft does

not operate at all and Uber can only use local taxi drivers instead of its typical ride-sharing operations. Yet these examples are clearly the exception to the rule as over time most government including most individual U.S. states, ended up adapting or lifting their regulations affecting ride-sharing applications, due in large part I am sure to popular demand.

With this backdrop, noting an apparent history of ultimately accepting some rule-bending behavior when it produces beneficial goods or services people enjoy (i.e., popular consumer products), now consider as a key factor the regulatory climate of the area lived in. For instance, in the United States there seems to be less technology regulation than Europe. Tech giants have more findings of antitrust law violations in EU nations than in the U.S. and marketers especially should be familiar with the stricter rules for website visitors from the European Union under the GDPR than the various laws in the United States, with only a few certain states such as California having more restrictive internet privacy laws than others.

Referring to the Napster example above, if marketers using AI are creating results that violate the copyrights of others are they liable? Or could these generative AI models be held at least partly liable as well? Some companies such as Adobe are already leaning into this concern to set their own products apart. Further questions for marketers to consider about AI content creation even include who owns the content produced through AI, which may not be as simple to answer as it initially seems.

More fundamentally, deep questions of privacy and consent surround AI. Disputes have arisen both in the training of AI models and the information received and results produced. AI is trained by, or learns from, books and other vast storehouses of content without the original authors' permission. Famous cases so far about AI consider whether this is copyright infringement or fair use. More disputes seem certain to arise soon. It is such an important topic that the U.S. Copyright Office itself is investigating too. There are also stories of employees leaking strategy through AI, but what about protected data and sensitive information such as contacts or customer lists? Or what if a marketer makes a false or misleading statement due to AI hallucinations which we should all be aware of by now? Unfortunately, many of these legal questions have yet to be fully resolved. However, marketers can still follow industry best practices, observe lessons from the past, and pay close attention to how these current lawsuits which may affect them are ultimately resolved.

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MEET THE EDITORS: MARKETING JOURNALS

James Blair, Indiana University

SPECIAL SESSION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Marketing researchers can investigate a variety of interesting topics impacting consumers, firms, and society as we are observing significant changes in the marketplace. This allows marketing researchers to investigate a variety of topics to further our theoretical understanding of consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and overall better understanding how the world works around us which is beneficial to scholars as well as practitioners and policymakers to make better decisions in the marketplace. With the wide scope of topics for marketing researchers to investigate there are a variety of research topics where scholars can make a positive impact with their work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing education will continue to be an area of research for scholars to better understand how we can best train the next generation of professionals for the workforce. With higher education institutions facing significant competition from external competitors and negative media coverage (Clark et al., 2026), continuing to research effective marketing pedagogy is beneficial for the field to show the impact being made in higher education through the training, learning, and skill development occurring throughout the curriculum and college experience. Assessing student learning to show how students are developing competencies throughout the curriculum will provide more evidence to skeptics the value within higher education. With the rise of artificial intelligence, rethinking how we assess student learning and the process of learning may need to be addressed by marketing scholars. Continuing to find ways to leverage experiential learning in higher education can provide additional value. In addition to learning competencies, higher education institutions may look at other outcomes from the course like student perceptions of fun and helpfulness as well as their likelihood of taking a similar class in the future (Blair, 2021). With a growing focus on retention and persistence metrics, higher education institutions may focus on what is keeping their students in their programs and keeping them loyal so they can be strong supporters of their time, talent, and treasure as alumni to support these academic programs in the long-term (Burke, 2019; Tight 2020).

As we continue to see artificial intelligence (AI) incorporated into more aspects of consumer lives and business operations, understanding how this impacts consumer attitudes, behaviors, and choices will be beneficial to firms. We are observing many consumers adapting this technology across multiple facets of their lives, while others are avoiding this technology being incorporated in their lives. Therefore, there is a need to understand how consumers trust and adopt this technology (Allison & Blair, 2025). With the rise of fluid consumers in the marketplace, individuals who have access to

mobile, smart technology have access to a wide range of information at their fingertips to influence their decision-making process. This keeps these individuals informed through significant information search but makes them knowledgeable in marketing strategies and tactics being employed as well as willing to switch between different brands and products available in the marketplace (Blair, 2019; Correia, 2016). Understanding how AI will impact the workforce will be beneficial for workforce development programs and allow professionals to better develop skillsets that add value to employers and increase their marketability (Blair & Allison, 2024). As corporations continue to change and adapt to changes in their environment, we may continue to observe the rise of the gig economy, automation, and technology where human employees with highly specialized skillsets may be sought out to solve more niche and high-level problems (Blair, 2016; Davis, 2016).

CONCLUSION

With the rise of AI technology in the marketplace, marketing scholars will continue to benefit from understanding how this technology impacts student learning, consumer behavior, and marketing strategy. Researchers providing new insights incorporating this new technology will help ensure the next generation of business professionals are well prepared to overcome obstacles and solve significant problems occurring in the marketplace by leveraging AI. Academic journals have provided marketing educators opportunities to publish work in this specialized area through calls for papers and special issues. Editors will continue to seek out work exploring these areas to better understand this phenomenon occurring in the marketplace.

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JAME AND MMJ AWARD WINNERS

James Blair, Indiana University

SPECIAL SESSION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Marketing journals are facing some significant issues in the review process. Many full-time faculty are feeling overwhelmed at work (Blair et al., 2024) and do not have the bandwidth to add additional service activities like reviewing. This has resulted in many scholars declining reviewing opportunities or not providing a high-quality review of a manuscript (Breuning et al., 2015). In general, we are witnessing a time-poor society where individuals are outsourcing tasks. With scholars, we are even observing some asking artificial intelligence (AI) to complete the review for them. This has resulted in challenges for editors to find high-quality reviewers to serve in leadership positions with academic journals and provide helpful feedback to researchers submitting manuscripts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With this shortage of faculty providing good quality reviews (Chua, 2025), this provides an opportunity for scholars to differentiate themselves in the marketplace through this service activity. Especially new scholars can give back to their discipline through service, get affiliated with high-quality reviewing opportunities, and through the review process improve their own research. Marketing scholars consistently accepting reviewing opportunities and providing quality feedback during the process are noticed by editors and associate editors of journals who may continue to go back to those reviewers for future opportunities. By marketing scholars establishing themselves as someone who is reliable and provides good quality reviews, this can lead to additional opportunities such as including the editorial review board or taking on a leadership role like an associate editor. Especially for new marketing scholars, this can be beneficial to understand how the review process works and through the consistent reviewing of articles it allows them to stay up to date with the literature and latest methodology used in the field which in turn helps with their own scholarly research.

It is imperative for the journals and leadership within the journals to not burn out their top reviewers (Hosseini & Horbach, 2023; Severin & Chataway, 2021) and find ways to nurture them through feedback and professional development opportunities. Providing feedback and positive encouragement to reviewers can keep them loyal to the journal and show appreciation for their service. This is important as marketing faculty are being pulled in many directions with their teaching, research, and service resulting in a time crunch to complete their growing list of tasks and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing not only benefits the field but is also beneficial to the individuals participating in the process. Journals able not nurture reviewers and provide them with a path for future professional development can offer a competitive advantage. This is especially important as journals are competing based on impact factors, citation counts, acceptance rates, decision times, and journal rankings. Having a strong pool of reviewers can help improve manuscripts submitted to the journal, increase the quality and impact of the research, and develop a strong and positive reputation for marketing scholars to submit their work.

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AN AI INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK FOR MARKETING COURSE DESIGN

Tomasz Miaskiewicz, Fort Lewis College

SPECIAL SESSION

The AI Integration Framework for Course Design provides a structured way to integrate AI into courses. Co-developed by the presenter, this framework has been used college-wide at a public liberal arts college. Level 1 of the framework (Basic Integration) provides initial exposure to AI; Level 2 (Extensive Integration) has students use AI extensively as part of course activities; Level 3 (AI-Enabled Personalized Learning) embeds AI into the learning experience by personalizing content and key activities; and Level 4 (AI-Transformed Learning) reimagines the entire classroom experience around AI. The framework will be illustrated through an example Principles of Marketing course implemented at Level 3. The presenter will also provide a future vision of the course at Level 4 of the framework.

Attendees will leave with a transferable model for incorporating AI at any institution, along with a concrete example of how AI can personalize the learning experience.

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PREPARING FUTURE MARKETERS FOR AN AI-AUGMENTED WORKFORCE

Nihat Ahmed, University of Central Florida

Carlos Valdez, University of Central Florida

SPECIAL SESSION

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SESSION

The conversation around artificial intelligence in marketing education often centers on tools. Faculty discuss ChatGPT, image generation, prompt engineering, and the latest technological developments. While these conversations are important, many educators are asking a broader question: What should marketing graduates actually know and be able to do in an AI-augmented workplace?

This special session explores how marketing education can evolve to prepare students for careers where AI is increasingly integrated into research, content creation, analytics, customer engagement, decision-making, and strategy development. Rather than focusing on a specific platform or technology, the session examines the changing expectations employers have for entry-level marketing professionals and the implications for curriculum design, classroom activities, experiential learning, assessment, and professional development.

Presenters will share perspectives from higher education, industry, and workforce-readiness initiatives, highlighting practical examples of how AI-related competencies can be integrated into marketing courses while maintaining a strong emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, ethics, communication, and strategic decision-making. Attendees will also be invited to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with preparing students for careers that may look significantly different from those of previous generations of marketing graduates.

VALUE TO ATTENDEES

Marketing educators are under increasing pressure to ensure that graduates are prepared for a rapidly changing professional environment. Many faculty members recognize the growing influence of AI but remain uncertain about which skills to emphasize, how to integrate AI into coursework, and how to balance technological proficiency with foundational marketing knowledge.

This session offers a practical and forward-looking discussion of these issues. Attendees will gain insights into emerging workforce expectations, strategies for incorporating AI-related competencies into marketing curricula, and ideas for helping students develop the adaptability needed to succeed in an evolving profession. The session is designed to encourage discussion, share experiences across institutions, and provide participants with actionable ideas to implement in their own programs and classrooms.

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AN INTEGRATED DECISION-MAKING LAB METHOD FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN MARKETING STRATEGY COURSES

Jose Mendoza, New York University

TEACHING COMPETITION PAPER

THE PROBLEM

Marketing strategy courses lean heavily on analytical frameworks such as game theory, multi-criteria decision analysis, scenario planning, dynamic pricing, and negotiation, yet students rarely use them under practitioner conditions: time pressure, incomplete information, and unpredictable rivals. Decision research identifies these conditions as especially corrosive to decision quality (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020); classrooms rehearse them poorly. Students can define a Nash equilibrium yet freeze when asked to act on one. Simulation-based learning produces a large positive effect on complex skill acquisition ($g = 0.85$ across 145 studies; Chernikova et al., 2020), particularly when students plan, act, assess, and receive immediate feedback across repeated decisions (Canhoto & Murphy, 2016). Even a decision-forcing case fixes much of the information environment: competitors and counterparties do not react dynamically to the student's choices. In a conventional case, discussion often ends where consequences would begin. The remaining gap is between understanding a framework and knowing how to wield it when consequences unfold (Laverie et al., 2022).

THE INNOVATION

The innovation is a single, integrated decision-making lab that runs across multiple class sessions. Each session pairs a strategic framework with a purpose-built browser tool; five tools form the method, each matched to a course module (Table 1). The sessions share one instructional architecture: framework, live decision, consequence, and structured reflection. Their sequence matters because earlier outputs inform later decisions rather than ending as isolated exercises. Game theory establishes rival responses; the pricing sandbox attaches economic consequences; scenario analysis stress-tests candidates against uncertainty; AHP structures the final choice; and negotiation trains students to defend a position under challenge. The culminating pitch demands the accumulated toolkit: teams combine AHP and scenario analysis into a recommendation grounded in the competitive and economic logic from earlier sessions, then defend it through structured peer critique.

Table 1

Lab Components, Course Alignment, and Classroom Format

Component	Framework Taught	Student Activity	Format
AHP Studio	Analytic Hierarchy Process (Saaty, 1980)	Pairwise comparisons, consistency checks, sensitivity analysis	Individual + team, 1 session
Game Theory Sim	Nash equilibrium, dominant strategies, repeated games	Multi-team airline competition across 5 rounds: pricing, capacity, branding	Teams of 3–5, 1 session
Scenario Sim	Scenario planning under uncertainty	2×2 matrices, robustness scoring, fragility assessment	Individual + team, 1 session
Negotiation Sim	BATNA, integrative vs. distributive bargaining	Negotiate against adaptive AI counterpart across structured rounds	Individual, 1 session
Pricing Sandbox	Dynamic pricing, demand elasticity	Set prices in real time; observe demand shifts, competitor reactions, profit impact	Individual, 1 session
Pitch Competition	Synthesis across tools	Teams combine AHP + scenario analysis to build and defend a strategic recommendation	Teams, 1–2 sessions

Each session moves from a short briefing, through live decisions whose consequences unfold on screen, to a structured debrief connecting experience to theory. The debrief is where surprises earn their keep: a price war or fragile favorite becomes a shared reference point the class can analyze together.

Each tool is browser-based and free for students, with no paid license, account, or installation required, reducing common costs and IT barriers (Zhang & Scribner, 2024). AI generates fresh scenario context, opponent behavior, and market conditions, limiting reuse of prior cohorts' solutions. The AI layer is deliberately bounded: generative models supply variation, while demand curves, payoff structures, consistency checks, and scoring mechanics remain rule-based and auditable. The economic relationships students are learning therefore do not drift with model output. Generative AI can lower barriers to adaptive educational simulations (Mollick et al., 2024). A meta-analysis of 45 studies found that AI-enabled adaptive systems outperform non-adaptive instruction on cognitive outcomes ($g = 0.70$; Wang et al., 2024), and in one pilot, negotiation students improved across rounds against an AI counterpart (Rottner, 2024). The method runs across multiple sections of two graduate marketing courses each semester.

EFFECTIVENESS

Controlled experimental evaluation is in progress. Current evidence is best read as student-reported indications of transfer, metacognition, and strategic awareness, not as demonstrated learning gains. In Spring 2026, 53 routine course reflections, reported only in aggregate with no student identified, were read in full and coded inductively by the instructor at a broad thematic level (Wong et al., 1995). Reflective writing serves as a data source because the learning strategies students document can predict later-

measured outcomes (Glogger et al., 2012). Here, however, coded themes indicate how students processed the experience, not what they can now do. With that limitation, the reflections suggest movement into the procedural and metacognitive territory marketing simulations can reach (Laverie et al., 2022).

Theory-to-practice transfer appeared in 47 of 53 reflections (89%). Students described how the game theory simulation turned the prisoner's dilemma from a textbook diagram into a market-wide price war triggered by one team's discount, dragging down every airline's margins. Several called it the moment game theory "clicked." The pattern is consistent with quasi-experimental evidence that competition simulations improve strategic decision-making beyond case-based instruction (You & Fan, 2025).

Strategic trade-off awareness appeared in 42 reflections (79%). Students dissected choices between volume and margin, and between short-term reaction and long-term positioning. They wrote about the pull of impulsive retaliation and the difficulty of holding a disciplined position while competitors cut prices. Competitive awareness appeared in 38 (72%): students realized, often too late, that attention to their own dashboards had allowed rivals to undercut them unnoticed, a competitive-intelligence lesson they said no lecture could have taught.

Changed decisions after structured analysis appeared in 31 reflections (58%). AHP weighting or scenario robustness scoring overrode initial intuitions, revealing that an exciting option could also be the most fragile; one team's preferred strategy had both the highest mean score and highest standard deviation, exposing a risk they would otherwise have missed. This is the shift in scenario pedagogy that aims from single-point prediction toward reasoning across plausible futures (Hillmann et al., 2018), and it echoes work on teaching AHP (Promentilla et al., 2018). One feature drew repeated praise: AHP Studio's anonymous input gave equal weight to every team member's judgment.

The pitch competition surfaced another pattern, observed but not tallied: peer critique. Students challenged rivals' AHP weights, questioned scenario axes, and identified blind spots. One student noted that an opposing team had combined two strategies to reduce fragility without showing that the combination would hold across all scenarios, a critique difficult to make without firsthand use of the tools. Peer assessment improves higher-order thinking, with a large effect on critical thinking and reasoning ($g = 0.97$; Zhan et al., 2023).

ADOPTABILITY

The author's hosted instance serves Competitive Strategy sections at New York University. The tools are also published on GitHub under an educational-use license; institutions can host their own instance and bear their own AI inference costs without paid licenses or vendor procurement. The code is accompanied by the briefing-decision-debrief architecture, sequencing logic, and sample cases, including a multi-airline market and a brand investment case, supporting either a single session or a full sequence. The approach transfers to management, operations, and entrepreneurship courses that teach competitive dynamics, decision analysis, or negotiation. Students need only a current browser.

A game theory session, for example, opens with a ten-minute briefing on a multi-airline market, runs five rounds of pricing, capacity, and branding decisions, and closes

by tracing collapsed margins back to the incentives that made the price war individually rational. Built-in instructions reduce tutorial time, and cases can be adapted to other industries. The game theory simulation is designed for 12 to 60 students; other tools have no technical class-size limit, although debrief quality constrains very large sections. A new adopter can typically deploy one component after a single run-through of about an hour.

CHALLENGES

Three issues remain. First, students new to interactive decision tools need a few minutes to orient; embedded onboarding prompts and a low-stakes first practice round have largely addressed it. Second, not every surprise deserves the same treatment. Because market mechanics are rule-based, unexpected behavior in the model can serve as useful material for debriefing. An implausible narrative detail is different: it is a model error and should be previewed and regenerated. Third, formal measurement of learning gains remains in progress. Current evidence rests on coded reflections and instructor observation; future evaluation will add pretest-posttest measures and controlled comparisons (Chernikova et al., 2020).

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TEACHING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: CUSTOM GPT CREATION AS KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Scott Cowley, Western Michigan University

TEACHING COMPETITION PAPER

PROBLEM

Marketing educators grapple with a number of competing pedagogical needs. Any marketing course has a number of course objectives to be met, compounded by the ever-present call for educators to teach relevant skills in engaging ways. Layered onto this is a new mandate to prepare students for an AI-driven future with the skills they will need to obtain careers and thrive. A challenge for educators is how to achieve an increasing number of pedagogical objectives well enough in a fixed amount of instructional time.

An important question posed by the introduction of AI is whether it can serve students and the aims of higher education to develop critical thinking instead of cognitive surrender. Without deliberate strategy, AI can be mistakenly added in ways that deliver minimal pedagogical value (or worse). To this end, this innovation guides students in (1) learning marketable AI skills, (2) developing critical thinking toward AI, and (3) improving knowledge retention of core topics and skills covered in course objectives. The innovation specifically guides students through training a custom GPT agent to perform a website analysis that the students first learn to do manually. This process yields the personal learning gains we might expect from having students teach other students a particular topic—only these gains are achieved through “teaching” AI.

INNOVATION DESCRIPTION

In a digital marketing course, students conducted website audits for a class client. These audits spanned various facets of marketing performance, including search engine optimization and conversion principles like persuasive marketing copy. The exact sequence of events in this innovation is described below:

1. The instructor walked the class through a step-by-step professional audit of the client’s website. In the process, students filled out an instructor-supplied template so that each element of the audit received a pass/fail grade along with any details about why a particular audit point was failed and how to address it. Students were also guided in the creation of an executive summary to highlight the major findings from the audit. This particular audit took 2 days of class time to complete together, leaving students with a professional-quality audit document.

2. After completion of the manual audit, students were put into teams and given access to a ChatGPT Pro account. The instructor taught students about how to make a custom GPT—a specialized version of the broader chatbot supplied with instructions to perform a specific way. The instructor taught students about the two core elements to creating the custom GPT: (1) adding the knowledge base and (2) providing the working instructions. In this case, the knowledge base would be the specific details about each

point of the audit and how to determine a pass vs. fail and what to recommend. The working instructions are the overview guidance about the custom GPT's purpose, how to use the knowledge base, and instructions for producing output.

3. Student teams were given 2 weeks to develop their best custom GPT to perform all of the same checks that students were able to do in the manual website audit. Students were told that the custom GPT needed to work solely by prompting the user to provide the website name. Students were also able to gauge the quality and progress of the GPT by checking it against the client's website they had previously audited manually.

4. Students collaborated on creating the instructions and iterative testing of their own custom GPTs and activated each of them publicly in the ChatGPT Store for community custom GPTs. Teams submitted links to their public custom GPTs to the instructor for evaluation.

5. To add a motivating dynamic and recognition for student work quality, the instructor also coordinated with professional marketers at two companies to evaluate each of the teams' custom GPTs and provide some feedback along with identifying the strongest submission for internal recognition.

ADAPTATION FOR MARKETING EDUCATORS

While this teaching innovation was used in an upper-level digital marketing course, the act of conducting a company audit of a similar quality is found throughout many types of courses. It could easily be adapted for a strategic marketing audit, social media audit, a brand audit, or other specific checks against best practices for specific types of text and visual content like email marketing.

The process of learning how to teach AI to automate something the marketer already knows how to do well is one of the major benefits to this teaching innovation, and reflects how a marketing organization would want AI to be used by professionals internally.

While this particular operationalization used a detailed audit that spanned two full days of class plus an additional two weeks of AI training time, this could easily be shortened to accomplish similar objectives with a smaller set of checks.

ANTICIPATING CHALLENGES

There are a couple of potential challenges to replicating this teaching innovation.

1. Cost. In this pilot test, funds were generously supplied by an internal teaching grant. Fortunately, it was relatively easy to set up a master account using a burner email and each student team created their own shared burner email to be added to the group account, as a way to minimize the overall cost. Ultimately, the real cost for the product is approximately \$20 per team and the accounts only have to be active for 1 month each.

2. Collaborative learning curve. There can be a learning curve for teams trying to work together on a shared set of training materials, especially when they may want to split up portions of the audit instructions. Teams learned that they could use the standard ChatGPT chat client to test a subset of instructions and fine-tune them before adding them to the group's master instructions, which they collaborated on in a virtual program, like Google Docs.

By learning to replicate their own work and knowledge within a custom GPT, students developed both relevant marketing and AI skills. Additionally, students

expressed a combination of positive takeaways related to critical thinking, better understanding of AI's limitations, and an increased interest in using their expertise to automate routine marketing tasks.

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MY JOURNEY IN THE PURSUIT OF BEING A MASTER TEACHER

Debbie Laverie, Texas Tech University

TEACHING COMPETITION PAPER

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I am honored to be a finalist for the 2026 Marketing Management Association Master Teacher Competition. My teaching philosophy is rooted in my belief that students are active participants in their learning. I challenge students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information rather than passively memorizing material. In my teaching, I leverage active learning and technology where I am the facilitator who acts as the “guide on the side,” not the “sage on the stage.”

I view learning as the holistic engagement of affect, cognition, and behavior. I challenge students to wrestle with the complexity marketers face today. By placing less emphasis on transmitting knowledge and *more* on developing skills and exploring the course material, students are involved in higher-order thinking. Students are challenged to think, talk, listen, read, write, and reflect on the course content. I employ problem-solving exercises, the Marketplace Live simulation, and case studies that require students to apply what they are learning.

My passion is helping students become market-ready candidates who are lifelong learners and can solve problems in today’s ever-changing environment. Nurturing relevant skills is critical so that students can work collaboratively to understand today’s marketing problems and gain the confidence to become marketing leaders. Driven by my passion for teaching, I have worked to refine my craft and help others elevate their teaching at TTU and beyond through my scholarly publications on teaching.

SCHOLARLY APPROACH TO TEACHING

I have adopted a scholarly approach to teaching, using research and reflection to improve student learning. After an inward focus on active learning in a large section, I was drawn to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), moving outward to conduct formal research and to publish the findings. SoTL was founded by Ernest Boyer (1990) in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Boyer encouraged academics to consider four overlapping areas of scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Boyer was motivated by all the great things that happened in classrooms behind that were never passed on in the manner we pass on discipline-based research. Boyer strove to legitimize research on teaching as true scholarship; he encouraged faculty to study their own classrooms systematically and to publish their findings.

I was drawn to SoTL work and to the movement led by Boyer and others such as Pat Hutchings and Lee Schulman. My interest in this line of work led me to accept a joint

appointment at the university teaching center at Texas Tech University (TTU). I spent 6 years at the university teaching center, where I championed systematic inquiry into student learning, informed by scholarly research on teaching and learning. I also spearheaded the introduction of service learning at TTU. I was an early adopter of active learning and a national leader with the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

This opportunity allowed me to branch out to pursue SoTL works across campus and eventually across the country. The SoTL cause was championed by teaching centers on campus and, nationally, by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

There were 12 cluster leaders in the US. I led a cluster of schools, including Texas Tech University (TTU) and four other institutions of higher education, in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The work of my cluster focused on Scholarly Inquiry on Active Pedagogies, 2005- 2008. We collaborated in SoTL research across the four campuses, presented at conferences, and published SoTL papers.

My work in SoTL has produced 16 Marketing SoTL publications. My goal is to pass on the scholarly approach to teaching to the doctoral students I have taught in my teaching seminar and to the students whose dissertations I have chaired or served on their committees. I have worked closely with. I am proud that 12 of my SoTL publications are with my past doctoral students.

TEACHING INNOVATIONS

My philosophy is consistent across undergraduate courses, master's courses, and the doctoral seminars; I love teaching at all three levels. My pedagogical approach fosters deep learning and develops the skills required to be effective in the workplace. For 30 years, I have faced this challenge by employing creative teaching techniques to engage students as deep learners.

I have adopted a team-based, active, and cooperative learning approach that begins with professors and students building a learning community. The combination of lecture and active learning develops a deeper understanding of the material. It enhances students' readiness for the complex work environment. In addition, these techniques are associated with high involvement, high-order thinking, and workplace skills.

I used service learning in IMC and Digital classes to bring the material to life, in which students applied their knowledge and skills to address gaps in the services that local nonprofits offer the community. These projects included marketing for a local arts alliance and promotion of homeless shelters for families.

In other classes, I creatively employed simulations to bring the marketing classroom to life, providing realism that reinforced marketing concepts (for undergraduate and Professional MBA students). The teams compete against each other in a global market. The experiential nature of simulations is beneficial for higher-order thinking and pushing students beyond mere memorization. In addition to the Marketplace Live simulation, I have students prepare a Marketing Plan and present a Board Report at the end to develop the skills needed in the workplace. Students receive a grade for these components and overall performance.

In appropriate classes, I have introduced the addition certifications and badges. Certifications are an effective way to address this challenge and signal to the marketplace the skills a marketing student possesses. Students can claim expertise,

have it verified by a third-party industry leader, and then demonstrate it through an applied service-learning project or other coursework. Digital badges provide a visual representation of a learned skill, typically earned in a virtual learning environment. Using Salesforce Trailhead badges, I have created a Trailmix, which is a playlist-type collection of badges for students to complete.

My doctoral courses are discussion-based. In Practicum, the course all business doctoral students take to learn how to teach, we use a text, SoTL articles, teaching observations, student-developed teaching demonstrations, and course teaching portfolios. In the final project in the class, doctoral students will teach a component of the course. In addition, the students develop and deliver a teaching demonstration. It is inspiring to see Ph.D. students develop the knowledge to design and implement effective courses.

At the doctoral level, students lead the discussion, and I guide the conversation to ensure deep learning. In the Consumer Behavior seminar, students read classic, seminal, and new-contribution manuscripts in the key content areas of consumer behavior. Students are challenged to understand the roots of our field of research, its theoretical underpinnings, the methodological approaches employed, and the epistemological assumptions that accompany them. My goal is for students to have a high-level academic discussion of articles, present their views, and learn to support their opinions with the literature. Students develop a paper for a conference or journal as the capstone project.

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