

AI in Entrepreneurial Marketing

Human oversight marketing capabilities and customer credibility

Generative AI offers start-ups opportunities to develop marketing content, personalise communication, and conduct market analysis with limited resources. However, access to AI does not necessarily translate into stronger marketing capabilities. Its contribution may depend on how entrepreneurs combine AI tools with their own expertise, customer knowledge, and quality-control practices.

This project investigates how start-ups integrate generative AI into their marketing activities and how different patterns of use relate to marketing capabilities and perceived customer credibility. Drawing on the resource-based view, it examines AI use alongside complementary organisational resources, particularly marketing expertise and human oversight. The central proposition is that the value of AI depends on how it is integrated into marketing practices.

Research question

How is generative AI use associated with start-ups' marketing capabilities and perceived customer credibility, and what roles do marketing expertise and human oversight play?

The project would address three related questions:

- How do the breadth and intensity of generative AI use relate to marketing capabilities?
- Does human oversight strengthen the relationship between AI use and marketing capabilities?
- How are marketing capabilities associated with entrepreneurs' assessments of their firms' credibility among customers?

Potential quantitative approach

The study would use a cross-sectional survey of founders or managers responsible for marketing in start-ups within a defined sector or geographic area. The questionnaire would measure generative AI use across marketing activities, existing marketing expertise, human oversight practices, marketing capabilities, and perceived customer credibility.

Where available, established multi-item scales would be adapted and pilot-tested. Human oversight could include checking factual accuracy, reviewing brand consistency, and evaluating the relevance of AI-generated content to customer needs. Firm age, size, sector, and marketing expenditure could serve as control variables.

Multiple regression would examine the proposed relationships, including a focused interaction test assessing whether human oversight changes the association between AI use and marketing capabilities. The final model and sample size would be guided by a power analysis and realistic recruitment opportunities. Findings would concern associations rather than causal effects, and customer credibility would be explicitly reported as the manager's assessment.

Expected contribution

The thesis would explain how AI use and complementary human resources jointly relate to entrepreneurial marketing capabilities. It would offer practical guidance on the expertise and oversight practices that start-ups may need to obtain value from AI-supported marketing.

Supervisor and contact

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Interested students are welcome to contact Mana Farshid to discuss the project and thesis scope.