

Louvain School of Management

The Integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools in Content Creation Working Processes

**Insights into Belgian Marketing and Consulting
Agencies**

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Declaration Regarding AI Tool Usage in Master's Thesis

During the preparation of this master's thesis, the authors used ChatGPT-3.5, ChatGPT-4, ChatGPT-4o, and Fireflies.ai for the following purposes:

- ChatGPT-3.5, ChatGPT-4, and ChatGPT-4o served as assistants for brainstorming and text reformulation.
- Fireflies.ai automatically recorded the interviews and provided summaries and transcriptions.

After using ChatGPT-3.5, ChatGPT-4, ChatGPT-4o, and Fireflies.ai, the authors diligently reviewed and edited the content produced by the tools. We take full responsibility for the final content presented in this thesis.

By signing this declaration, we affirm that the content of this master's thesis reflects our original work, augmented by the responsible use of AI.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to study the integration of generative artificial intelligence technology in content creation within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies. Our goal is to provide valuable insights into the adoption of AI, particularly generative AI, informing industry practices and guiding future research. To this end, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to summarize existing academic knowledge on AI in marketing. This review addresses the key elements of AI integration, from its goals and strategies to its benefits and challenges. We then carry out a qualitative study designed to answer our primary question: “how are generative AI tools integrated into content creation processes in Belgian marketing and consulting agencies?”. To achieve this, we conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with decision-makers from various firms in order to explore their motivations, the specific applications of GAI tools, and the challenges they encounter. Our results corroborate several aspects of the literature review while also providing new insights into the practical application of GAI in these industries. Key findings include GAI's significant role in enhancing productivity and creativity in content generation, improving personalization in marketing strategies, and aiding data-driven decision-making. Its adoption is driven by both internal motivations, such as operational efficiency and employee interest, and external pressures, like competitive dynamics. However, the paper also outlines potential drawbacks, including the risk of over-reliance on AI and the need for human oversight to ensure quality and coherence. Despite these challenges, the integration of GAI tools is fundamentally transforming marketing and consulting practices, offering valuable benefits and competitive advantages.

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technologies has transformed various sectors, with marketing and consulting being notably impacted. In recent years, generative artificial intelligence tools have emerged as powerful instruments in content creation, reshaping the processes and strategies employed by companies. This thesis aims to elaborate on the current state of the integration of generative artificial intelligence tools in content creation working processes within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies.

This paper builds upon a qualitative study with the objective of better understanding how artificial intelligence is implemented in the marketing and consulting industries, where innovation and competitive advantages are critical. We carry out a comprehensive review of existing literature on artificial intelligence in marketing, focusing on definitions, applications, and managerial aspects. Next, we conduct semi-structured interviews with decision-makers within Belgian marketing and consulting firms to gather primary data on the integration of generative artificial intelligence tools. A horizontal content analysis is then employed to identify common themes, trends, and divergences (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) among interviewees, followed by a discussion confronting our findings with existing literature and delving into subsequent managerial considerations and research limitations.

Throughout this process, we faced several challenges, such as the dynamic nature of artificial intelligence technology, which demanded continuous updates to our literature review to ensure relevance and up-to-date theory. Coordinating interviews also posed logistical difficulties, particularly in obtaining participation from high-level executives. Additionally, ensuring the confidentiality and accurate transcription of interviews required meticulous attention to detail. Nevertheless, the findings of this paper provide valuable insights into industry practices and guide future research, shedding light on the adoption of artificial intelligence within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies, a relatively uncharted area in academic research.

1.1. Motivations

Initially, our idea was to explore the use of marketing in the Metaverse, as we were attracted by what advertising and promotion of products and services might possibly look like in the future. However, after consulting our thesis advisor, we decided that it would be more valuable for the academic community to shift our focus to artificial intelligence by examining how companies are implementing artificial intelligence technologies. This foundational approach is

crucial before exploring specific artificial intelligence applications, such as those in the still-developing Metaverse.

This study is motivated by a significant gap in existing research on the application of artificial intelligence in marketing. This gap is primarily due to the recent acceleration in the development of the field, which has resulted in a limited academic literature. This novelty, added to the constant and fast-changing evolution of artificial intelligence applications in the business world, makes it an essential area for academic examination, underlining the importance of this research.

The focus on artificial intelligence is driven by its potential to significantly alter the landscape of marketing, already noted by various authors, such as Chintalapati & Pandey (2022), Sestino & De Mauro (2021), and Kumar et al. (2019). As students in this field at a Belgian university, we recognise the necessity to investigate how companies in Belgium are incorporating artificial intelligence technologies into their operations. Understanding this phenomenon is crucial, as it aligns with our academic expertise and addresses an important research need.

Moreover, this paper aims to deliver a detailed overview of the current integration of generative artificial intelligence in the marketing and consulting sectors specifically. We find it relevant to concentrate on these areas, as both are heavily impacted by the increasingly accessible and versatile artificial intelligence technologies. This understanding will provide insights into how these breakthroughs are reshaping the standards and practices of these two sectors.

1.2. Contributions

Over the past decades, the integration of artificial intelligence in marketing has been extensively explored, particularly focusing on how it enhances marketing strategies and operations. Research has predominantly investigated its role in data analytics: studies have shown how artificial intelligence applications facilitate dynamic adjustments in marketing campaigns, enhancing responsiveness and relevance in fast-paced market environments. In addition to data-driven marketing strategies, the literature has also delved into the operational efficiencies brought about by artificial intelligence in marketing practices: its automation capabilities are frequently highlighted, especially in content generation and customer interaction processes. The literature also explores the integration of artificial intelligence tools within traditional marketing workflows, examining its challenges and potential in streamlining marketing operations and enhancing the creative process.

Hence, current studies collectively outline a landscape where artificial intelligence not only augments the analytical aspects of marketing, but also transforms operational methodologies. By documenting its extensive applications and integrations across different facets of marketing content creation, the existing literature sets a comprehensive backdrop that underscores the profound impact of artificial intelligence technologies in reshaping marketing strategies. This provides a solid foundation for discussing new contributions to the field, emphasising areas where further advancements in artificial intelligence can be instrumental in driving marketing success.

This thesis aims to strengthen current academic knowledge by extending research on the use of generative artificial intelligence in Belgian marketing and consulting companies and to understand its current integration, through an analysis of its characteristics via interviews with corporate decision-makers. Our contribution to the literature is based on three different aspects:

- Firstly, as indicated in the aforementioned motivations, the existing gap is primarily due to the novelty of impressive artificial intelligence breakthroughs, but also to the constant and fast-changing evolution of artificial intelligence applications in marketing, making it a key area for academic examination and highlighting the importance of continuous research.
- Secondly, we provide detailed case studies of Belgian marketing and consulting firms, offering empirical insights into the practical application of artificial intelligence technologies in these sectors. Indeed, interviewing decision-makers from these areas to understand the current use of generative artificial intelligence applied to marketing will enable a deeper understanding of how companies in Belgium are adopting and leveraging generative artificial intelligence tools to enhance their marketing efforts.
- Finally, current academic knowledge often remains within a theoretical framework (Haleem et al., 2022; Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022; Kaličanin et al., 2019). By interviewing decision-makers from Belgian companies, we aim to contribute to scientific knowledge by extending the research to an empirical view of the subject, enabling a better comprehension of the implications of generative artificial intelligence adoption from a managerial perspective, rather than simply elaborating on its various potential uses.

Given these insights, our thesis opens avenues for future research to delve into the long-term strategic impacts of artificial intelligence adoption. It also prompts investigation into how the current integration of artificial intelligence compares to future integrations, particularly in light of forthcoming artificial intelligence technology breakthroughs.

2. Literature Review

This section of our thesis presenting our literature review is structured into two main segments. Initially, the first section elucidates the concept of artificial intelligence, including the relevant terminology and its application to business, with a particular focus on marketing content. The second section delves into current practices, exploring how companies are leveraging artificial intelligence within their marketing content creation processes.

2.1. Relevant Terminology

2.1.1. Artificial Intelligence

In contemporary academic and business topics, terms such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, and Generative Artificial Intelligence (respectively shortened to AI, ML, DL and GAI) pervade articles and discussions. To ensure clarity for the reader, this section provides an explanation of each concept.

Artificial intelligence stands as a technology of computer science, aiming to instruct computers in understanding and replicating human communication and behaviour (Haleem et al., 2022). According to Huang & Rust (2018) and to Campbell et al. (2019), AI is distinct from other technologies in that it can learn from data and experience, and then adapt over time autonomously. In other words, AI can self-learn.

When AI applies to standard commercial processes, the integration of these technologies allows for learning, acting, and performing tasks with a human-like intelligence, ultimately streamlining business transactions and saving both time and money (Haleem et al., 2022).

Defined computationally and digitally, AI encompasses machines engineered to replicate or even surpass human capabilities in mechanical, cognitive, and emotional tasks, according to Huang & Rust (2018). Russell & Norvig (2009) agree and then define AI as the intelligence demonstrated by computers mirroring human cognitive functions like problem-solving. Longoni et al. (2019) contribute by defining AI as any machine using algorithms or statistical models to perform perceptual, cognitive, and conversational functions akin to the human mind.

Sestino & De Mauro (2021) go further by explaining that artificial intelligence endeavours to emulate certain facets of human intelligence through technological means. Defined as a domain encompassing studies and techniques rooted in computer science and statistical modelling, AI holds profound economic and social implications. Its primary objective is the development of

technological systems capable of problem-solving and executing tasks traditionally associated with the human mind (Konar, 2018).

In the context of this thesis, AI will be defined as the branch of computer science dedicated to constructing intelligent machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. The realisation of AI's full potential hinges on its capacity to learn from past experience and/or large datasets, and this is where machine learning and deep learning, subfields of AI, can be respectively integrated (Valeur & Liekis, 2023).

2.1.2. Machine Learning

Machine Learning, a subset of AI, plays a pivotal role in data analysis and interpretation, as highlighted by Haleem et al. (2022). Arasu et al. (2020) further emphasise the integral role of ML as a sub-discipline of AI, contributing to addressing diverse market challenges and facilitating recovery from business crises.

Campbell et al. (2019) and Chevalier (2023) agree to define Machine Learning as a field of study that focuses on the development of algorithms and statistical models that enable computer systems to automatically improve their performance on a specific task by learning from data, without being explicitly programmed. Chevalier (2023) goes further by explaining that Machine Learning can be used for a variety of applications, such as image and speech recognition, natural language processing, and predictive analytics. To sum up, the AI takes an input and provides an output.

2.1.3. Deep Learning

Deep Learning, on the other hand, is a more sophisticated subfield of Machine Learning that uses artificial neural networks with multiple layers to perform complex tasks, such as image and speech recognition, natural language processing, and autonomous driving (Campbell et al., 2019; Chevalier, 2023). In the point of view of Chevalier (2023) and Haleem et al. (2022), deep learning algorithms are particularly effective at learning patterns in large, complex datasets, and can achieve state-of-the-art performance on a wide range of tasks. The algorithm is trained on a large dataset to understand user queries, text, images, and speech patterns. Once the model is trained, it can be used to make predictions on new, unseen data without the need for explicit feature extraction or labelling.

As a final point, artificial intelligence and more particularly Machine Learning and Deep Learning are used in business and marketing. Indeed, these technologies enable decision-

makers to collect valuable insights from massive amounts of data and deliver faster more specific and relevant content allowing companies to stay ahead of emerging trends (Haleem et al., 2022).

2.1.4. Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence represents a new generation of an advanced category of AI technologies capable of creating new digital content from prompts provided by users (De Cremer et al., 2023). Through generative AI, users can specify the desired type and characteristics of the outputs they seek, and the AI will produce the requested materials accordingly. Additionally, numerous generative AI applications feature a conversational interface, enabling users to refine the outputs by providing further details and specifications (Wahid et al., 2023).

“A generative AI model is a type of machine learning architecture that uses AI algorithms to create novel data instances, drawing upon the patterns and relationships observed in the training data” (Feuerriegel et al., 2023, p. 112). Kowalczyk et al. (2023) complete the definition by adding that generative AI refers to computational techniques that can produce new and relevant content like text, images, or audio based on their training data.

Finally, the broad adoption of this GAI technology, highlighted by innovations such as Dall-E 2, GPT-4, and Copilot, is currently revolutionising our professional interactions and communication methods (Feuerriegel et al., 2023). Gao et al. (2023) agree and suggest that companies are gaining easier access to AI technologies and thus being empowered to create more compelling marketing content. They assert that the creativity and impact of advertising campaigns are positively influenced by the integration of AI, which revolves around three main segments: image and video production, copywriting, and content planning. This aligns with Chintalapati & Pandey’s (2021) observations that the arrival of AI in the marketing sector has had a profound impact on the creation of advertising content, particularly with regard to the escalating demand for personalized content across various media platforms.

2.2. Companies’ Management of Generative AI in Marketing Content

Now, we are entering the main section of our literature review, in which we focus on various aspects concerning the application of artificial intelligence in marketing content creation. Its integration into a wide range of practices has garnered substantial attention in recent years, reflecting a shift in the landscape of marketing strategies. This literature review presents some

key findings from various studies, exploring the transformative impact of AI on marketing communications.

Our research is structured around multiple topics, identified as essential for a thorough examination of AI's transformative influence on marketing in companies. This organisation aims to provide a holistic perspective on the subject, facilitating a detailed analysis of AI's integration through the prism of GAI tools' use and its implications across corporate settings.

2.2.1. Use in Companies

The intersection of artificial intelligence and digital marketing has emerged as a focal point in contemporary business discourse, reshaping conventional marketing strategies and practices. As noted by Chintalapati & Pandey (2022), the advent of AI has profoundly impacted various functions within digital marketing, ushering in an era characterized by enhanced decision-making capabilities and the automation of complex tasks. This sentiment is echoed by Sestino & De Mauro (2021) and Kumar et al. (2019), who underscore the pivotal role of AI, particularly in companies from developed nations, attributable to the abundance of big data resources facilitating its implementation.

Moreover, Vlačić et al. (2021) show the transformative impact of AI-based platforms on corporate performance, citing notable examples such as Google or Spotify. This sentiment is corroborated by Patil et al. (2021), who underscore the widespread adoption of AI among leading companies, reflecting a paradigm shift in marketing paradigms. Alsheibani et al. (2018) agree and add that it has been observed that larger organisations are more capable of adopting new technologies due to the heightened competitive pressures they experience. The positive correlation between firm size and technology adoption can be attributed to the greater financial and technical resources available to larger organisations. However, Jain and Aggarwal (2020) present a nuanced perspective, delineating the varying degrees of AI integration across industries, with a significant proportion of enterprises still in the nascent stages of incorporating AI into their marketing practices.

In fact, in a study involving 100 senior marketers across diverse industries, it was found that 55% of enterprises are either currently implementing or contemplating the adoption of artificial intelligence in their marketing strategies. Furthermore, by the year 2018, it was projected that 20% of all business-related content would be generated by automated systems. Among the marketers surveyed, 51% reported the active use of AI in their practices, with an additional 27%

indicating plans to integrate AI into their digital marketing strategies in the near future (Jain & Aggarwal, 2020).

The proliferation of generative artificial intelligence tools has garnered significant traction across organisational landscapes, as evidenced by Nir Kshetri et al. (2023). Notably, the adoption of such tools transcends the confines of large corporations, permeating into the operations of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), thereby democratising access to AI-driven marketing solutions. However, Tarapata (2023) provides a counterpoint, highlighting the persistent digital divide prevalent among certain business segments, particularly sole proprietorships and small enterprises, which lag in embracing digital innovations for marketing communication purposes.

2.2.2. Decision to Use AI: Internal or External Incentives

2.2.2.1 External Incentives

The market which pushes to a paradigm shift towards extreme content personalisation within marketing content practices, propelled by the integration of AI technologies, has emerged as a defining trend in contemporary marketing discourse (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022). This evolution underscores the imperative for businesses to leverage AI-powered insights to enhance customer engagement and drive marketing efficacy.

On another side, Kumar et al. (2019) elucidate a fundamental transformation in market dynamics, wherein the focus has shifted from maximising returns on investment to optimising information management in a knowledge-driven economy. This shift signifies a broader transition towards an externally incentivized market landscape, wherein the currency of success is predicated on the adept management and use of information resources. In this sense, the exigencies imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have further catalysed the adoption of AI in marketing, as articulated by Vlačić et al. (2021). The pandemic-induced shift towards online consumer behaviour necessitates enhanced marketing channel capabilities, with AI-powered tools. Consequently, AI emerges as a pivotal enabler for marketers seeking to navigate the complexities of the “new normal” and meet evolving consumer demands in a digitally mediated landscape.

In other words, the compelling impetus for integrating AI into marketing strategies emanates from a confluence of external pressures, as understood by Shaik (2023). Competitive dynamics play a pivotal role, with organisations feeling compelled to adopt AI-driven solutions to remain competitive in an increasingly crowded marketplace. Moreover, media attention, digital

maturity, and evolving consumer expectations collectively contribute to the imperative for AI integration, highlighting the multifaceted nature of external incentives shaping marketing strategies (Shaik, 2023).

2.2.2.2 Internal Incentives

In tandem with these developments, there exists a discernible trend among global marketing professionals towards embracing AI-driven marketing strategies (Jain & Aggarwal, 2020). The increasing indispensability of customer data underscores the pivotal role of AI in augmenting marketing efficacy, heralding a broader industry-wide transition towards AI-powered marketing solutions. Alsheibani et al. (2018) note that the commitment of top management plays a crucial role in enhancing the adoption of new technologies, exerting a significant positive impact.

Dabbous et al. (2020) establish a comprehensive model that integrates both individual and organisational elements with the intent to employ AI in workplace environments. This framework includes a few factors contributing to the use of AI in companies. Indeed, among others, self-image has been found to exert a substantial positive influence on employees' readiness to adopt AI, indicating that individuals are more inclined to embrace innovations that align with their personal identity. This supports that self-image is a crucial determinant of technology adoption. In addition, the decision to adopt new technologies like GAI is also shaped by the personal habits of employees.

2.2.3. Roles & Tasks

As the landscape of marketing has been reshaping, we are noticing that researchers, such as Haleem et al. (2022), underscore the multifaceted applications of AI tools in companies, ranging from analysing competitors' campaigns to guiding users towards business-aligned objectives through intuitive chatbots and interactive web designs. This perspective aligns seamlessly with the observations of Chintalapati & Pandey (2022), who emphasise the pervasive influence of AI across various facets of digital marketing.

According to Wahid et al. (2023), GAI tools exhibit an outstanding ability to simplify the generation of various types of content, ranging from informative to emotive and transactional domains. Moreover, the role of AI extends even further into the realm of content creation, as highlighted by Anantrasirichai and Bull (2021), who emphasise AI's potential to eliminate language-related obstacles through machine translation. Haleem et al. (2022) accentuate the transformative impact of AI on marketing strategies, highlighting its role in automating tasks,

personalising content, and adapting to evolving market trends, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of advertising.

Soni (2023) delves into the underlying drivers behind the latest breakthroughs in GAI tools, attributing its progress to significant developments in computational performance and the leverage of vast volumes of unlabelled data for pre-training, thus leading to unrivalled efficiency and rapidity. However, Gupta et al. (2024) argue that, while the adoption of AI, exemplified by ChatGPT, promises to facilitate content creation, interrogations persist as to its ability to fully ensure that its outputs are coherent with the business image. The authors caution against taking ChatGPT's originality for granted, stressing the importance of human insights and the need to critically examine and verify AI-generated content.

2.2.3.1 Personalisation & Targeted Advertisement

As previously explained, artificial intelligence has triggered a remarkable shift in the personalisation of advertising content. Haleem et al. (2022) emphasise AI's role in streamlining marketing operations, particularly in customer profiling and content personalisation. By collecting data, AI can identify consumers' desires and rapidly deliver customized advertising across multiple channels, which enhances companies' return on investment. This observation is in line with that of Huang and Rust (2021), who highlight AI's analytical prowess in deciphering consumer emotions and preferences, thus enabling data-driven marketing strategies tailored to consumer needs.

Indeed, in this sense, one of the pivotal roles of AI in marketing lies in its ability to analyse vast datasets with precision, facilitated by machine learning algorithms, as explained by Arasu et al. (2020). This analytical prowess enables marketers to derive actionable insights, personalise content for better consumer experiences, and optimise marketing strategies with unparalleled precision.

Moreover, still in this aspect of managing huge datasets, Ahn et al. (2022) shed light on the pivotal role of AI agents in delivering targeted advertising by linking with consumer databases such as Amazon and Google, and promptly responding to users' inquiries about products and services. This seamless integration of AI agents further underscores the changing impact of AI in transforming the dynamics of digital marketing, seamlessly blending with existing strategies and technologies.

Following that, as highlighted by Nir Kshetri et al. (2023), the advent of generative AI has revolutionised marketing content by enabling marketers to create bespoke content tailored to

individual preferences and behaviours, which ties in with Chintalapati & Pandey's thoughts regarding the drive to achieve extreme personalisation (2022). This personalized approach fosters brand loyalty, drives conversions, and amplifies overall marketing effectiveness. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of AI across diverse marketing functions underscores its indispensable role in modern marketing practices, as emphasized by Shaik (2023) and Patil et al. (2021).

Consequently, Hermann (2021) points out that AI-powered personalisation is advantageous both to customers through more captivating advertisements and to companies by improving their efficiency. Moreover, as Vlačić et al. (2021) note, the widespread use of AI has led to a reassessment of the competencies expected of modern marketers, underscoring the need for adaptability in an AI-intensive landscape. Nevertheless, while operations such as personalisation and ad bidding benefit greatly from AI incorporation, concerns emerge regarding algorithmic biases and data precision, as delineated by Soni (2023).

Lastly, as Chintalapati & Pandey (2021) point out, AI adoption in marketing is accompanied by apprehension regarding consumer privacy. While AI-driven personalisation promises to optimise advertising campaigns, it simultaneously amplifies ethical dilemmas related to data security. The perpetual interplay between customisation and consumer privacy underlines the need to consider the ethical issue surrounding the personalisation of marketing content. Moreover, the proliferation of AI-powered personalisation also invites scrutiny regarding potential discriminatory practices, as outlined by Campbell et al. (2019). The authors warn against unintentional discrimination by AI algorithms, which could breach legislation.

2.2.3.2 Text & Copywriting

The use of GAI in textual content creation relies heavily on appropriate prompt engineering. According to Korzyński et al. (2023), a well-crafted prompt can encompass several key factors. Initially, providing a context is crucial to define the role to be assumed by the AI. Then, clear instructions are necessary to describe the assignment. Next, input data allows for quick training. Finally, specifying the expected output format ensures the desired structure of the response. These principles are vital for guaranteeing that AI-generated text is relevant and tailored to specific needs.

The comparison between human and AI-generated content reveals differences in quality and creativity. As noted by Salvagno et al. (2023), although AI can generate preliminary texts based on existing ideas, it falls short of replacing the expertise and imagination inherent to human authors. AI-generated texts might fail to display the subtlety or uniqueness characteristic of

human writers, often resulting in ambiguous and erratic outputs. Furthermore, the detection of chatbot-generated content can prove difficult due to their sophisticated use of natural language processing to mimic human texts. However, certain indicators like the absence of nuanced expressions and structural irregularities can help identify AI-generated material.

As Kacena et al. (2024) indicate, AI technologies can significantly reduce the time required by authors, particularly when composing texts in a non-native idiom. Nevertheless, they also argue that employing AI for text generation introduces ethical and legal considerations, as AI systems may inadvertently violate copyright regulations, generate distorted content, and encounter hallucinations, where untruthful claims are presented as accurate. This underscores the risk of AI contributing to the production of substandard texts featuring misleading content. Korzyński et al. (2023) emphasise further issues, including AI's propensity to replicate textual material without truly comprehending it, and the difficulties faced by AI beginners when it comes to the formulation of prompts.

2.2.3.3 Image & Video

The integration of AI into image and video generation represents a significant advancement in digital marketing and creative content production. As Benbya et al. (2024) explain, image generation systems, powered by deep learning algorithms, possess the ability to translate textual prompts into visual representations. They emphasise that recent research suggests stories transformed into visual form via text-to-image AI experience heightened creativity.

There are a number of fundamental guidelines that must be adhered to in order to obtain the expected outcome, as pointed out by Korzyński et al. (2023). These principles include employing a diverse range of adjectives to establish the intended ambience, specifying image quality and style, mentioning artist names, limiting the quantity of image elements, and ensuring the specificity of prompts.

Furthermore, a substantial corpus of videos containing descriptive captions is needed to instruct text-to-video generation algorithms, as noted by OpenAI (2024). The more elaborate the captions, the better the resulting videos. OpenAI also emphasizes the versatility of its AI-driven tool Sora, which can accept non-text inputs like images or videos, therefore empowering it to execute a broad spectrum of operations, such as video elongation and transitions between disparate video segments.

Despite the transformative potential of GAI and its various applications, concerns persist regarding its impact on traditional marketing roles. Tarapata (2023) suggests that AI has the

potential to replace humans in the future landscape of marketing professions. Nonetheless, Jain & Aggarwal (2020) accentuate the myriad benefits of AI-enhanced marketing, emphasising its role in driving innovation and efficiency on a global scale.

2.2.4. Budget

Contrarily to Tarapata's view expressing that artificial intelligence is rarely used in sole proprietorships or in small and medium companies, Haleem et al. (2022) observed that the integration of AI into marketing strategies has heralded a significant shift, making once-exclusive AI resources accessible to a broader spectrum of businesses. They highlight this democratisation, emphasising that what was once reserved for large corporations is now within reach for medium- and small-sized businesses.

Similarly, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) and Taulli (2023) underscore the affordability of generative artificial intelligence tools in marketing, noting that while not all tools are freely available, the costs associated with their usage are not prohibitive. This accessibility has positioned AI as a game-changer for small-scale businesses, as articulated by Shaik (2023), who views AI as a panacea for small enterprises seeking to expand their reach globally in an era of globalisation. However, as said before, Tarapata (2023) offers a nuanced perspective, suggesting that the adoption of AI among small businesses may be influenced by financial considerations. This suggests a potential barrier to entry for businesses with limited financial resources.

The traditional approach to advertising, as elucidated by Wen et al. (2022), often involves casting a wide net through media purchases, which can be both costly and challenging to gauge in terms of accuracy. In contrast, AI investments offer a more targeted and cost-effective alternative. Wen et al. (2022) argue that while AI investments may initially appear expensive, they ultimately offer a more efficient and precise method of advertising. This aligns with the claims made by Haleem et al. (2022) and Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) regarding the accessibility and affordability of AI resources, suggesting a consensus among researchers regarding the transformative potential of AI in levelling the playing field for businesses of all sizes.

Alongside the considerations of budgetary implications associated with generative artificial intelligence tools, understanding the significance of a structured AI budget within organisational contexts is key. Indeed, according to Hoffman et al. (2020), elements like structure, resources, and culture are critical within an organisation. Aligning emerging technologies like AI with the organisation's strategic goals is essential. For example, it is vital

for organisations to secure top management support, foster an environment conducive to innovation, and provide sufficient resources, such as budget, skilled personnel, and availability.

2.2.5. Employees & Trainings

Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) shed light on a notable trend in the adoption of generative artificial intelligence tools within marketing circles, suggesting that mid-level and junior marketers exhibit a greater inclination towards using such tools compared to their senior counterparts. This observation underscores a potential generational divide in the adoption of AI technologies, with younger marketers perhaps more receptive to embracing innovative solutions in their marketing strategies.

Although Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) express greater inclination from younger marketers to be more receptive to adopt GAI, Shaik (2023) offers a complementary perspective, emphasising the importance of continuous training and preparedness for future technological advancements within businesses. According to Shaik, the rapid pace of innovation necessitates proactive planning and ongoing skill development among personnel to ensure they remain adept at leveraging emerging technologies effectively. Shaik's stance underscores the importance of bridging this gap through consistent training initiatives aimed at equipping personnel at all levels with the necessary skills to leverage AI effectively. Hoffman et al. (2020) agree and argue that it is crucial for firms to provide sufficient resources, such as skilled employees.

2.2.6. Benefits

2.2.6.1 Efficiency Gains & Customer Satisfaction

Several researchers have provided valuable insights concerning more benefits of the transformative effects of AI on businesses, customer engagement, and marketing operations. Notably, Haleem et al. (2022) agree on the pivotal role of AI tools in facilitating personalized content for better customer experiences and determining content targeting strategies. The authors highlighted how AI-driven algorithms can efficiently analyse vast datasets to guide marketers in delivering relevant and timely content to their target audience, thereby enhancing customer engagement and driving conversion rates.

Moreover, the benefits, underscored by Patil et al. (2021), are numerous, particularly on the customer experience side, as highlighted by Haleem et al. (2022). Through AI-driven solutions, businesses can not only tailor advertisements but also reduce waiting times, thereby elevating overall customer satisfaction and engagement. In addition, by harnessing AI-powered recommendation engines and personalized content generation, marketers can deliver

unparalleled customer experiences, leading to heightened conversion rates and elevated customer satisfaction levels.

Additionally, Wu & Monfort (2022) and Ahn et al. (2022) provided insights into the profound impact of AI marketing strategies on organisational performance through customer satisfaction and efficiency gains. Their studies demonstrated how AI-driven approaches enable firms to enhance service quality, increase profits, and improve sales growth through targeted advertising campaigns. Alongside that, they highlighted the efficiency gains achieved through the deployment of AI technologies in marketing operations. Their research emphasized how AI enables companies to achieve rapid turnaround times and cost savings by automating repetitive tasks and streamlining marketing processes. Leveraging AI tools allows firms to improve operational efficiency and resource allocation, thereby maximising their marketing ROI.

Lastly, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) precised the significant efficiency and productivity gains that can be achieved by leveraging generative artificial intelligence tools for marketing content creation. They emphasized the dynamic messaging capabilities enabled by GAI, which leverages personalisation to deliver tailored messages to customers based on detailed data insights. Additionally, GAI was portrayed as a cost-effective solution that drastically reduces the time and resources required for content creation while offering higher quality insights into customer behaviour for more effective behavioural targeting.

2.2.6.2 Competitive Advantage

The potential of AI extends beyond targeted advertising, as elucidated by Nir Kshetri et al. (2023), who emphasise the opportunities presented by generative AI in enhancing efficiency and productivity while reducing costs. This aligns with the observations made by Wu & Monfort (2023), who argue that marketing capabilities are integral to the success of AI marketing strategies, enabling companies to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Furthermore, Haleem et al. (2022) underscore the multifaceted capabilities of AI tools, emphasising their role in not only targeting customers with precision but also in analysing competitors' campaigns and discerning customer expectations. This sentiment is echoed by Patil et al. (2021), who highlight AI's ability to predict customer buying behaviour patterns, enabling businesses to deliver personalized and timely advertisements tailored to individual preferences.

From the initial planning stages to the conversion and customer loyalty phases, AI emerges as a central protagonist in driving the success of marketing endeavours. Companies that fully harness the power of AI stand to gain a significant competitive advantage, as AI empowers

them to make data-driven decisions and adapt dynamically to changing market dynamics (Haleem et al., 2022).

However, while the potential benefits of AI in marketing are evident, challenges and complexities also exist. The successful implementation of AI strategies necessitates a deep understanding of both marketing principles and technological capabilities (Wu & Monfort, 2023). Additionally, businesses must navigate ethical considerations surrounding data privacy and algorithmic biases to ensure responsible and equitable AI deployment (Wu & Monfort, 2023).

2.2.7. Negative Sides

2.2.7.1 Integration Difficulties

In the previous section presenting the advantages, Shaik (2023) taught us his nuanced opinion about the adoption of AI in marketing operations. In this section dedicated to the downsides, the author goes beyond by elucidating the technical challenges of AI integration. He underscores the complexity of achieving technical compatibility within marketing operations. Moreover, the author identifies a lack of technical capabilities within marketing teams as a significant impediment, highlighting the indispensable role of skilled personnel in navigating the intricacies of AI implementation. Ultimately, the formidable challenge of data management emerges as a critical bottleneck, underscoring the need for robust data infrastructure to support AI-driven marketing initiatives.

In addition to that, a critical aspect of leveraging AI effectively in marketing endeavours is the development of a robust framework, as advocated by Huang & Rust (2021). This strategic framework encompasses crucial components such as marketing research, segmentation, targeting, positioning, and actionable marketing initiatives.

Echoing concerns about the readiness for AI adoption, Kumar et al. (2019) emphasise the contextual challenges facing firms, particularly in developing economies. While acknowledging the transformative potential of AI, they caution against the hasty implementation of AI tools, advocating for incremental approaches that leverage existing human resources alongside emerging technologies to navigate the complexities of technological integration.

Lastly, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) shed light on the practical barriers hindering widespread AI adoption, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The authors highlight cost considerations and data security concerns as primary impediments to GAI use,

underscoring the critical role of trust in fostering AI acceptance. Moreover, they point that the perceived risks and transition costs associated with adopting new marketing paradigms may deter businesses and employees from embracing GAI-driven approaches.

2.2.7.2 AI Incapacities & Ethics

Contrary to apprehensions surrounding AI's impact on human interaction, Jarrahi (2018) and Huang & Rust (2021) advocate for a symbiotic relationship between AI and Human Intelligence (shortened to HI), suggesting that all levels of AI intelligence can augment HI to enhance emotional intelligence. Nevertheless, Huang & Rust (2021) underscore the intrinsic value of human emotions, suggesting that AI may not fully replicate the depth of human feelings, thereby affirming the irreplaceable nature of human intuition and empathy.

In addition, as pointed out by Kumar et al. (2019), the successful execution of personalized marketing endeavours hinges upon overcoming inherent constraints such as data volume, quality, and implementation challenges.

Despite its potential benefits, AI remains also shrouded in controversy. Alongside these drawbacks above-mentioned, Haleem et al. (2022) insist on pervasive concerns regarding privacy implications, as frequently highlighted in the literature.

2.2.7.3 Employee Reluctance

According to Blom in 2018, it is established that organisational changes are a source of stress and anxiety, which has become inevitable in our modern society. He also added that continuous stress was negatively impacting organisational change efforts. The central challenge for organisations, in the author's opinion, is to develop effective methods to reduce these negative emotions in order to stay efficient in the changes.

In addition, Haleem et al. (2022) underscore the pervasive challenge facing marketing teams: a deficiency in data science and AI expertise. This dearth of specialized skills impedes organisations' ability to leverage vast datasets effectively, hindering their capacity to derive actionable insights and drive informed decision-making processes.

Shaik (2023) agrees on that and advocates for a proactive approach to technology integration. Embracing new technologies, albeit disruptive, is essential for firms seeking to maintain a competitive edge in today's dynamic marketplace. By acknowledging and addressing potential challenges proactively, companies can navigate the complexities of technological transformation and capitalise on the myriad opportunities afforded by AI-driven innovations.

Authors shed light on preventing AI usage drift: Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) wrote about a noteworthy development, which is the banning of ChatGPT by several companies. This precautionary measure reflects the growing awareness of data security and privacy concerns in the era of AI-driven technologies. By pre-emptively addressing the possibility of sensitive data breaches, organisations demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding both proprietary information and employee privacy.

2.2.7.3.1. Fear of Being Replaced

The most severe reason behind this reluctance could be the fear of participating to their own replacement. AI has the potential to replace marketers in the management of marketing tasks (Tarapata, 2023). In agreement with that, Kumar et al. (2019) assert that recent advancements in AI can scale operations significantly while maintaining result accuracy. Campbell et al. (2019) agree by emphasising that AI's mechanical intelligence outperforms human ability in performing routine marketing tasks, boosting both efficiency and effectiveness.

This concept of own replacement is explained by Huang & Rust (2021) who delve into the ongoing discourse surrounding the role of artificial intelligence in marketing, highlighting persistent debates about whether AI serves to augment (Jarrahi, 2018) or replace human capabilities (Tarapata, 2023). Huang & Rust's study framework delineates the evolving relationship between AI and human intelligence, pointing that AI initially augments HI but eventually replaces it within specific intelligence levels. This progression, they argue, reflects historical trends and projections of AI's continued advancement across mechanical, thinking, and feeling intelligences. The collaboration between AI and humans, therefore, necessitates advancement to a higher intelligence level, where machines autonomously perform tasks previously reliant on human intervention.

Contrary to their previous optimistic view of AI augmentation, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) raise concerns about the potential job displacement caused by generative artificial intelligence. They highlight the significant job losses attributed to GAI implementation in organisations. Despite acknowledging that AI tools cannot fully supplant human skills and experiences, they emphasise the tools' capacity to execute marketing tasks with greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This dichotomy underscores the nuanced impact of AI adoption on the workforce, balancing the benefits of automation with the challenges of job displacement and skill redundancy.

Although these authors have a nuanced opinion on AI replacing humans, we should not forget that plenty of authors insist of the fact that AI exists to help marketers. Kumar et al. (2019), Wu

& Monfort (2021) and Shaik (2023) have all emphasized the helping nature of artificial intelligence. In this sense, Vlačić et al. (2021) highlight the crucial role of human-AI interaction in shaping the future of GAI-powered marketing tools. They stress that effective use of AI hinges on collaborative efforts between humans and AI systems. This partnership emphasizes the importance of digital proficiency and advanced technologies in driving marketing development.

2.2.8. Future

Shaik (2023) paints a transformative picture of the marketing landscape, asserting that artificial intelligence is poised to revolutionise the field in the near future. As GAI-driven technologies continue to evolve, they will fundamentally alter marketing practices, reshaping how businesses engage with customers and execute marketing strategies. This paradigm shift underscores the necessity for organisations to adapt to AI-driven marketing environments, capitalising on the potential for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in reaching target audiences.

In contrast, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) shed light on the burgeoning market for AI in marketing, projecting substantial growth from \$15.84 billion in 2021 to an estimated \$107.5 billion by 2028, particularly in the United States. They advocate for a nuanced approach to research, emphasising the significance of psychographic and perceptual factors, such as comfort with technology, influencing the adoption of generative AI tools. Moreover, they call for investigations extending beyond individual-level analyses to encompass organisational-level factors, including firm characteristics and past technological experiences, which shape the adoption landscape.

Building upon these insights and as introduced in the previous section, Vlačić et al. (2021) insist on the indispensable role of human-AI interaction in shaping the future of GAI-powered marketing tools. Despite the rapid advancements in AI technology, the authors contend that effective use of GAI tools hinges on rigorous collaboration between humans and AI systems. This symbiotic relationship underscores the importance of digital proficiency and cutting-edge technologies in driving marketing development, with AI serving as a cornerstone for innovation and strategic advancement in the field.

2.3. Hypotheses

Our paper aims to complement existing literature by examining Belgian marketing and consulting agencies' use of AI. Therefore, we establish and test several hypotheses.

- **Hypothesis 1:** The majority of companies now incorporate AI into their marketing strategies.

Justification: A study presented by Jain & Aggarwal (2020) found that 55% of enterprises surveyed are either currently using or planning to use artificial intelligence in their marketing efforts. Additionally, Chintalapati & Pandey (2022) report that AI has significantly altered digital marketing, enhancing decision-making and automating complex processes. This transformation is further supported by Sestino & De Mauro (2021) and Kumar et al. (2019), who highlight AI's crucial role in optimising marketing functions across various industries, demonstrating its widespread adoption and integral value in modern business practices.

- **Hypothesis 2:** The size of a company influences AI integration into marketing processes.

Justification: Tarapata (2023) highlights a significant digital divide that affects particularly smaller business segments. These entities often show a reluctance in adopting advanced digital innovations for marketing, reflecting disparities in access to technology and resources that are more readily available to larger firms. Furthermore, Alsheibani et al. (2018) add that it has been observed that larger organisations are more capable of adopting new technologies, implying a positive correlation between firm size and technology adoption.

- **Hypothesis 3:** Younger professionals are more likely to use GAI tools in marketing strategies.

Justification: Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) report a distinct trend within marketing departments where mid-level and junior marketers show a heightened readiness to adopt generative AI tools, in contrast to their senior colleagues. This tendency suggests a generational shift in technological adoption, where younger professionals, possibly due to greater familiarity with emerging technologies or more flexible adaptation to new tools, are leading the integration of AI into marketing practices.

- **Hypothesis 4:** The integration of AI into marketing strategies is predominantly driven by external pressures.

Justification: Shaik (2023) underscores that the push towards adopting AI in marketing strategies is not merely internal innovation but arises from various external pressures. Competitive dynamics necessitate the adoption of AI-driven solutions to maintain a competitive edge in a saturated market. Additionally, the influence of media attention, the evolution of digital capabilities, and changing consumer expectations converge to create a compelling

environment that demands technological adoption, underscoring the complex web of factors that catalyse AI integration in marketing strategies.

- **Hypothesis 5:** AI tools are multitasking across various roles, reshaping the marketing landscape by handling diverse and complex functions.

Justification: Gao et al. (2023) note that the accessibility of generative AI technologies has revolutionized advertising communications by enhancing creativity and the impact of campaigns across image and video production, copywriting, and content planning. Furthermore, Chintalapati & Pandey (2021) highlight AI's profound influence on the production of personalized advertising content, demonstrating its versatile application across media platforms. Complementing these insights, Anantrasirichai and Bull (2021) illustrate AI's extended capabilities in content creation, such as overcoming language barriers through machine translation, indicating that AI tools are now integral to multiple facets of marketing operations, thus significantly broadening their functional spectrum within the industry.

- **Hypothesis 6:** The budget for AI tools does not constitute a significant barrier to entry for companies, thereby facilitating widespread adoption.

Justification: Haleem et al. (2022) observed a significant democratisation in the availability of AI technologies. Furthermore, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) emphasise the cost-effectiveness of generative artificial intelligence tools in marketing, noting that while not all tools are free, their associated costs are not prohibitive. Shaik (2023) also highlights the transformative potential of these accessible AI resources for small-scale enterprises, positioning AI as a strategic asset in global market expansion efforts. Together, these observations suggest that cost is increasingly becoming a non-issue in the adoption of AI tools across the business spectrum.

- **Hypothesis 7:** Companies organise training programs to ensure their employees are up-to-date with the latest AI advancements.

Justification: Shaik (2023) emphasizes the critical need for continuous training and skill development to keep pace with the swift advancements in AI technology. Shaik argues that without proactive planning and regular training, businesses risk falling behind as AI continues to evolve. Additionally, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) observe that while younger marketers are more eager to adopt AI, ongoing education across all levels is crucial to fully leverage AI capabilities effectively, ensuring that all employees, regardless of age, can contribute to and benefit from AI-driven strategies. This approach not only enhances individual competency but also fortifies the company's overall adaptability and competitiveness in a technology-driven marketplace.

- **Hypothesis 8a:** AI integration enhances marketing efficiency by saving time.
- **Hypothesis 8b:** AI integration enhances marketing efficiency by optimising resource allocation.

Justification: Wu & Monfort (2022) and Ahn et al. (2022) demonstrate the efficiency gains from incorporating AI into marketing strategies. Their studies highlight how AI facilitates rapid turnaround times and cost savings by automating routine tasks and streamlining marketing processes, thereby enhancing operational efficiency. Additionally, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) detail the substantial efficiency and productivity improvements that generative AI tools offer in marketing content creation, noting these tools as cost-effective solutions that reduce both time and resource expenditure. This collective research underscores the transformative impact of AI on marketing operations, driving increased ROI through smarter, more efficient practices.

- **Hypothesis 9:** Decision makers working in companies that integrate GAI in their marketing strategies feel that they gain a significant competitive advantage.

Justification: Supported by Haleem et al. (2022), this hypothesis underscores the strategic importance of AI throughout various phases of marketing—from planning and execution to customer loyalty. AI's role as a central protagonist enables companies to leverage data-driven decision-making and dynamic adaptation to market changes, thereby securing a substantial competitive edge in the increasingly data-centric business environment.

- **Hypothesis 10:** Due to the rapid adoption of AI tools in business, there remains a persistent need for human verification.

Justification: Gupta et al. (2024) provide the basis for this hypothesis by noting that while tools like ChatGPT significantly streamline content creation processes, there are ongoing concerns regarding their ability to consistently produce outputs that are fully coherent with the established business image. This situation underscores the critical role of human oversight in reviewing and refining AI-generated content. The necessity for such verification not only highlights limitations in current AI capabilities but also reflects a broader caution or reluctance among employees to rely entirely on automated systems without human input.

3. Empirical Study

In this section, we outline the methodology employed in this paper. We detail various aspects of our work, such as the definition of our subject and the conduct of the interview process.

3.1. Subject & Research Question

This paper is grounded in a qualitative study, where the “goal is to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, and to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 11). Indeed, the objective of our research is to enhance comprehension of the adoption of GAI tools within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies. To achieve this, we use both secondary data, that is existing data, as well as primary data, which we gather through numerous interviews where participants provide verbal responses rather than numerical information (Pleyers, 2022). Moreover, this qualitative study is considered direct, as interviewees are conscious of the paper’s objectives (Pleyers, 2022).

Furthermore, we follow an inductive approach, as “themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 2). In writing this paper, we draw extensively from the insights collected during the interviews. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the information and concepts in our literature review also contribute to later sections of our paper, thus showing that “qualitative content analysis does not need to exclude deductive reasoning” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 2).

Defining our research question was a challenging task, as we dealt with several considerations, including whether to incorporate consumer perceptions and which countries and profiles to focus on. To aid our decision-making process, we arranged a meeting with AI specialist Vincent Becker, who provided highly valuable information on the topic of artificial intelligence and assisted us in narrowing and defining our subject. Following this discussion and thorough reflection, aimed at aligning our choice with our previously stated motivations and contributing to the existing body of research, we decided to focus our study on an in-depth analysis of:

The integration of GAI tools in content creation working processes: insights into Belgian marketing and consulting agencies.

3.2. Continuous Literature Review

Our literature review is continuously developed and refined throughout the writing process of this paper. Given the rapidly evolving nature of AI, relying on a single moment in time for the literature review would have risked it being outdated. By conducting multiple research waves, we ensure that important sector evolutions occurring during the writing of this paper are captured. Furthermore, to guarantee the quality and credibility of our literature review, we focus on scientific articles and eBooks sourced from comprehensive databases such as Google Scholar.

3.3. Sample Identification

We target a population consisting of CEOs, marketing directors, and other roles with decision-making authority. This selection is mandatory, as the subject of our paper requires us to gather insights from high-level decision-makers who hold significant power over strategy and creativity and possess comprehensive knowledge about the firm and its use of AI. Our focus is exclusively on companies operating within Belgian territory, specifically belonging to the marketing or consulting sectors, encompassing a variety of sizes and consumer types. To identify contacts, we leverage our personal network and use platforms such as Google and LinkedIn.

3.4. Contact Phase

We compile a comprehensive list of potential contacts, documenting relevant information such as name, company, position, LinkedIn profile, and email address. In addition to this contact list, we maintain a separate sheet specifically for candidates we have already reached out to, in order to enhance our interview planning. This approach enables us to effectively keep track of past and upcoming interviews, closely monitor pending communications, and send reminders to contacts who did not respond to our initial emails.

We reach out to eighty-eight contacts in total, conducting eighteen semi-directive interviews with twenty individuals from sixteen different companies. These interviews are primarily individual, with only one of them involving three collaborators from the same company. Also, while most contacted individuals do not respond, three kindly inform us of their unavailability or reluctance to participate in interviews on artificial intelligence.

We created a grid containing relevant details about each of our twenty interviewees (*Appendix 1*). Their anonymity is preserved by attributing numbers to their names and replacing company names with letters. Along with their roles and the age of the company, their age category is mentioned, structured into three brackets: “21-35” refers to individuals who grew up with technology, “36-50” to those who started working as technology emerged, and “51-65” to those who began their careers before the widespread use of technology. Also, the size of the company is defined by the number of employees¹: micro-firms have less than 10 employees, small ones between 10 and 49, medium ones between 50 and 249, and large ones have 250 or more.

3.5. Interview Process

Interviewees are presented with a range of question types, including open, semi-open, and closed questions. This variety allows for a “relatively open, non-directive, permissive and indirect approach to collect data from interviewees” (Lefèvre & Severino, 2022, p. 23), granting them freedom while still adhering closely to the main topic of discussion. All interviews are conducted in French, the primary language of the interviewees. Also, out of the eighteen interviews conducted, fifteen are performed using an online video meeting platform, two are realized by phone, and only one takes place in person.

Moreover, in preparation for the analysis and discussion sections of this thesis, transcriptions are performed for all interviews. However, since our analysis uses verbatims as primary data, anonymising the entire content of the transcriptions was not relevant to our paper; they are therefore not included in the appendices to avoid breaching participants’ confidentiality. The verbatims, on the other hand, are completely anonymised to protect interviewees’ sensitive data and can be consulted in the appendices (*Appendix 3*).

Interviews adhere to the classic qualitative interview procedure, which mainly involves tackling the subject in a funnel structure – from general questions at first to more precise ones later on – and encompassing all discussion themes in the interview guide while enabling interviewees to openly explore them without significant intervention from our part (Pleyers, 2022). Additionally, most interviews last from 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the participant’s inclination to delve into the subject.

¹ This classification is based on **economie.fgov.be** criteria (<https://economie.fgov.be/fr/themes/entreprises/pme-et-independants-en/definitions-et-sources>).

Due to time constraints related to our internships, it is not feasible for both of us to attend every meeting: therefore, we divide the workload to ensure fairness. A summary of each meeting is then shared with the absent member to ensure everyone is informed about the responses and the progress of our research. We obtain participants' consent for recording and assure confidentiality of the information.

An interview guide (*Appendix 2*) is prepared prior to the interviews, aligning with the hypotheses we defined, and sent to those who request it. It is mainly structured into two sections: introductory questions aimed at gaining a better understanding of the interviewee, and inquiries focused on AI in marketing, delving into the company's use of AI, the rationale behind its use, as well as the associated benefits and risks.

3.6. *Analysis Process*

After collecting and meticulously processing both secondary and primary data, we proceed to their analysis, a crucial phase for ensuring accurate results and the credible validation or invalidation of our hypotheses. For this purpose, we conduct a horizontal content analysis, a highly rigorous scientific method allowing for better data analysis and information interpretation, consisting in the “description of the data in an objective, systematic and quantitative manner” (Lefèvre & Severino, 2022, p. 34).

This method comprises seven working phases, as described by Pleyers (2022):

- **Phase 1 – Interview Transcription:** all conducted interviews are accurately transcribed.
- **Phase 2 – Unit of Analysis Definition:** multiple codes are defined for each theme based on our theory, hypotheses, and interview content.
- **Phase 3 – Development of the Grid:** we create an analysis grid containing themes and interview participants.
- **Phase 4 – Filling of the Grid:** the grid is completed using content from interview transcriptions.
- **Phase 5 – Thematic or Lexical Analysis:** a horizontal analysis is conducted by considering responses provided by each interviewee.

- **Phase 6 – Quantification:** an analysis of the frequency at which codes, behaviours and opinions are mentioned by participants is not performed in our study, as we focus on the interview content itself.
- **Phase 7 – Summary Report:** summaries of our findings for each theme are elaborated.

Thanks to the summary reports, we are then able to identify trends, convergences, and divergences for each of our eight themes, enabling us to define clear takeaways that confirm or reject each hypothesis. Furthermore, while our analysis grid would have permitted a vertical analysis, we opt to adhere to the horizontal approach: this decision aligns with the paper's objective of providing insights into the integration of GAI tools within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies as a whole, rather than specifically focusing on individual company behaviours.

3.7. Artificial Intelligence & Auxiliary Tools

Artificial intelligence plays a crucial role at various stages of our research and paper writing process. Firstly, for the contact phase, we use a Google extension called Apollo.io to retrieve the contact information of our potential interviewees on LinkedIn. This streamlines the process, saving us considerable time and enabling us to access email addresses that would have been very challenging to find through Google searches. Secondly, during our interview process, we use Fireflies.ai for our Teams calls: this AI tool allows us to concentrate solely on conducting interviews without the need to simultaneously take notes or record. The application automatically records the calls and provides us with summaries and transcriptions, although requiring minor corrections due to errors made by the voice recognition algorithm. Finally, ChatGPT-3.5, ChatGPT-4, and ChatGPT-4o serve as assistants for brainstorming and text reformulation.

4. Analysis & Findings

This section presents the findings of our study. It is organised as follows: we begin by revisiting the research question, hypotheses, and thematic areas of investigation. Subsequently, for each research theme, we integrate the insights gathered from interviews through a horizontal content analysis, detailing participants' opinions and experiences within their respective organisations.

4.1. Defining Research Themes

To address our research topic “the integration of GAI tools in content creation working processes: insights into Belgian marketing and consulting agencies”, we opt for a horizontal content analysis, as detailed in the preceding methodology section.

After identifying our research codes and retrieving corresponding relevant information from our interview transcriptions, we establish our grid of analysis (*Appendix 3*), comprising eight themes based on our ten hypotheses, further divided into forty-six sub-categories in order to visualise the data as accurately as possible. To provide a clear overview of our themes, we have created a table containing the eight topics of investigation (*Appendix 4*).

Furthermore, to guarantee the anonymity of our interviewees and the confidentiality of company information, our findings follow the pattern explained in the methodology: names are replaced by numbers and company names are substituted with letters. It is also important to note that mentions of “artificial intelligence” and “AI” throughout the subsequent sections strictly refer to generative AI, as it is the primary focus of our interviews and the main use of such technologies within the Belgian marketing and consulting agencies we interviewed.

4.2. Use of AI

As cited above in our methodology, out of the thirty responses we received, twenty decision-makers confirmed the use of artificial intelligence within their companies during the interviews. Among the remaining ten respondents who did not participate further, three kindly answered that AI was not yet implemented in their firms. Among those who responded positively, we observe that the extent of AI use across these companies depends on factors such as the recency and frequency of use. The spectrum of use ranges from preliminary experiments with free AI tools, as seen at firm O, to comprehensive integration within marketing processes at organisation C, as cited by person 4: “*because every time I talk to certain people, when I tell them what we've got, the way we've automated certain things, they're always blown away, so I*

have the impression that we're always a bit ahead of the game in this respect". Indeed, we observe that AI, and especially GAI tools, are integrated within the different agencies.

These interviews were held in collaboration with various types of leaders from a diverse range of company sizes. Participants included executives from small startups, such as companies A and O with only 3 or 4 employees each, to large international² agencies like firms G and J, which employ thousands of workers. In addition, our sample of decision-makers encompasses a diverse age range, spanning from individuals in their early twenties to those in their late fifties, highlighting the intergenerational adoption of AI.

4.3. *Decision to Use AI*

Our interviews demonstrate that, in the Belgian marketing and consulting sectors, the decision to integrate AI into business operations is influenced by a combination of internal motivations and external pressures, reflecting a nuanced approach that aligns with both strategic business objectives and dynamic market conditions.

4.3.1. Internal Incentives

Internally, companies often initiate the use of AI driven by the need to enhance operational efficiency. For instance, interviewee 1 notes that *"given that [they] have a small business, that [they] don't really want to grow any bigger at the moment because [they] have other activities on the side, and that [they] don't want to hire more people, [they] quickly noticed that, with artificial intelligence, you can really optimise your time in a much more calculated way"*. Furthermore, the need to achieve more efficiency can emanate from upper management, as expressed by person 17: *"there is also this CEO's desire to push us to work on this"*.

Additionally, the decision can simply come from an employee interest in artificial intelligence. Numerous interviewees explain their personal interest for new technologies and more precisely for AI with as example person 3 and person 12 respectively stating that *"[...] [they're] quite passionate about AI and all that can be done with it, [they've] always enjoyed using tools to optimise daily tasks"* and that *"[they] know that [they've] explored a bit with [their] partner [...], who is much more into digital plumbing in general. So, [they're] always very up to date. [They explore] a lot."*

² In the case of international groups, our interviews were conducted specifically with representatives from the Belgian branches.

4.3.2. External Incentives

Conversely, external influences also play a critical role. The competitive landscape and industry standards prompt firms like company M to adopt AI. Indeed, person 16 states that “*[...] of course, [they] are inevitably driven by the market, by competition [...] or because the market needs to move faster, because [they] need to respond faster, especially in retail where you need to be very reactive. So, [they] always have to anticipate or respond to the competition, etc., and [they] are obliged to follow the trend a little bit*”.

Moreover, some companies feel pressure from direct competitors push companies to take the plunge. For person 18, by observing competitors, they can announce that it would be a huge miss to not use AI: “*I think it's a hazard of market pressure and the fact that today, it would be really unfortunate for an agency to miss out on this*”. More drastic interviewees even esteemed that the pressure is so great that if AI is not integrated, the company will soon no longer be able to operate. Decision-maker 19 thus states that “*today, it's a new revolution, and for [them], a communication agency that doesn't want to bring artificial intelligence into its walls [...] could close in a few months*”.

4.4. Roles & Tasks

The use of artificial intelligence tools in Belgian marketing and consulting agencies is multifaceted, performing various roles that enhance marketing content creation processes. The use of AI is evident across numerous tasks, ranging from text generation and translation to content optimisation and data analysis.

4.4.1. Text Generation & Copywriting

The use of AI for text generation and copywriting is a significant aspect of operational processes in these agencies. AI tools are frequently employed to create textual content, as stated by person 3: “*[...] it's mostly writing. I use it almost every day [...]*”. Likewise, person 18 mentions that “*copywriting [...] is the great classic. Today, you can really use AIs for that without any problem*”. The specific application of AI in text-related tasks allows for a blend of efficiency and creativity.

4.4.2. UX Content

The integration of AI for UX content focuses on enhancing user experiences through improved web content and design. Agencies leverage AI tools to optimise website performance, user engagement, and content accessibility. For instance, decision-maker 4 expresses the use of AI

in website creation and optimisation: *“we also create websites. For example, when it comes to writing the text for this website so that it's SEO friendly”*. This indicates that AI is employed to improve website content and search engine visibility, ensuring that websites are both user-friendly and easily discoverable online. Moreover, we also observe that CMSs³ are increasingly integrating AI-powered features in their services. Person 11 states that *“[...] in website creation, [they] use WordPress with the Divi CMS, and Divi, in fact, to stay a leader in the market, is integrating more and more AI functionalities”*.

4.4.3. Translation

AI's application in translation tasks is another key area within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies. AI tools are employed to handle translation work, making the process easier and faster. Indeed, persons 1 and person 2 explicitly mentioned using AI for translation, highlighting its importance in their workflow: *“I also use it a lot for translation”* and *“it is [...] translated by Chat GPT, for example”*. This indicates that GAI is a valuable tool for breaking language barriers and facilitating communication across different languages. Although not all agencies heavily rely on AI for translation tasks, its utility in enhancing communication and operational efficiency is evident, particularly for agencies dealing with multilingual content.

4.4.4. Project Management

As we aim to show how GAI impact marketing content creation through all working processes, we must consider every managerial task around content creation, which explains our decision to briefly explore GAI influences on content project management. Respondent 18 emphasizes *“[...] time management [...]”* as one of AI's uses, indicating that AI tools are used to monitor project timelines and ensure timely delivery.

In addition, interviewees underline the role of GAI tools in automatising repetitive tasks, allowing employees to focus on more valuable missions. Person 14 provides an example: *“[...] we're going to use AI to formalise quotations and invoices for customers. Sometimes, when you have to draw up estimates, it's quite repetitive”*.

³ A content management system (CMS) is a software application that lets users create, edit, collaborate on, publish and store digital content (Robinson et al., 2024).

4.4.5. Image, Video & Audio Generation

The integration of GAI for generating images, videos, and audio is diverse and evolving. Some agencies use generative AI tools to enhance creative processes and produce high-quality visual and auditory content. For instance, respondent 13 declares its use of AI for visual creation: *“for the part of visual design, today, 100% of the visuals produced for our e-books are made using generative AI”* and *“[...] every time [our designer] designs something today, there isn't an image that comes out without a bit of input from generative AI in [the] design process [...]”*.

Contrarily, some companies like firm F refuse to use generative artificial intelligence tools to generative visuals, stating that *“[they] don't use tools like Adobe, like Dall-E, image generation or MidJourney, because they don't have the quality that [their] clients want”*. In between, we observe some agencies which prefer using GAI tools to help them during the process of brainstorming before creating visuals, considering these technologies as a source of inspiration. Indeed, person 6 indicates that *“as for the images, [they] use them as a source of inspiration. But then [they] don't use them”*.

Although these findings reflect varying levels of in-house adoption, they also indicate a growing use of generative AI for image creation, with tools like DALL-E and MidJourney frequently cited for their capabilities.

4.4.6. Content Optimisation

AI-driven content optimisation is a fundamental practice within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies. These tools focus on enhancing textual and visual content performance and efficiency across various platforms. Person 15 states that *“the second use is to upgrade [their] deliverables, and [they] call it the challenger. Meaning, [they'll] create a text and ask it to challenge or upgrade that text”*, indicating that AI is used to improve content quality.

GAI tools are also employed for verifying and correcting existing content, such as documents or images. Numerous AI-integrated software, like Adobe Photoshop, are used in visual retouching, pictures enhancement or even video and audio editing. Decision-maker 12 declared: *“[...] in visual retouching, in visual enhancement, I mean in photography, etc., I would say that Photoshop, for example, was already a tool that worked very well from the outset, even without AI. Now, by adding the AI layer, it's true that all of a sudden, it takes on quite impressive dimensions”*. This broad applicability of AI in content optimisation supports agencies in delivering high-performance and impactful outputs.

4.4.7. Brainstorming

AI serves as a valuable tool for brainstorming, providing inspiration, generating ideas, and aiding in planning processes. These capabilities enhance creativity and efficiency in developing new concepts and ideas for both textual and visual content types. Respondents bring to light AI's role in generating suggestions and serving as a source of inspiration, with person 1 mentioning that “[...] in the case of [Company A], [they] use it a lot to help [them] create content, not to create the content for [them], but rather to find inspirations both for text and images”, thus indicating that AI helps in generating and refining ideas.

AI undertakes the role of a colleague and aids in structuring and organising ideas, making the brainstorming process more efficient and productive. This is underlined by respondents from company G, who declared: “I would say that I use AI like a buddy or a very good colleague to brainstorm with” and that “sometimes I also use it for brainstorming of a different kind, like when it's about team activities where we have to brainstorm on the team's SWOT, how we can see the future”. Likewise, the person 11 stated that “[they] also use it in planning: it's not bad when [they] say 'I'm starting this project, what are the exhaustive steps so I don't miss anything?'”.

4.4.8. Data Analysis

As stated by **person 9**, “[...] understanding the consumer, understanding their environment” is often the first step before content creation. Therefore, AI's role in data analysis is pivotal, providing insights that drive decision-making and strategic content planning. Respondents emphasized AI's importance in data analysis, with participant 7 mentioning that “it's going to help [them] to work better, to better synthesise data”. This highlights AI's ability to handle large volumes of data and extract meaningful information.

Consequently, AI also plays a crucial role in identifying trends, generating predictive insights, and based on that, optimising marketing contents. This is perfectly explained by interviewee 18: “there will be a more strategic and systemic approach where you'll try to prompt an AI to say, 'okay, draw inspiration from this framework or this company and all the data available' or even from certain PDFs or others that you can put into your AI and say, you've come to query this database and try to chat a little with it, but for much more systemic reflections [...]”.

4.5. Budget

Managing AI budgets poses a critical challenge for companies as they navigate the complexities of allocating financial resources to AI technologies. Understanding how organisations approach

budgeting for AI and whether financial barriers exist in the adoption of GAI tools is therefore essential.

4.5.1. Budget Definition

4.5.1.1 Structured Approach

Agencies allocate an AI budget for various purposes, including tool subscriptions and employee trainings. A structured approach allows agencies to systematically plan and manage their AI investments, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to support strategic objectives. However, only a few agencies adopt a structured approach, guided by global directives and internal needs. For instance, person 9 declares: “[...] *we have the strength of being part of a global group and let's say that this group has chosen for us which AI is favoured and so we have enterprise access [...]*”. This illustrates how global strategies shape local investments in AI. Similarly, company J, also a large firm, adopts the same structured strategy.

Interestingly, company M, a medium-sized enterprise that is neither large nor part of an agency group, has also introduced a budget for GAI tools. As decision-maker 16 states: “*yes, there's more and more [budget adjustments], and I believe it's done regularly to keep things somewhat up to date, to see in relation to the budget [...] and to see in relation to the requests that come in and to say 'this, this was useful, we used this tool and we'll have to use it a bit more, we'll need to allocate a budget for that one; on the other hand, this thing, we used it and ultimately there's another one that's much more important or it's integrated into another program, so it's no longer needed'*”.

4.5.1.2 Flexible Approach

Conversely, all other agencies adopt a flexible approach to AI budgeting, characterized by the absence of predefined budgets. This approach focuses on assessing needs and opportunities on a case-by-case basis. Person 6 describes a rule of three approach, where investment decisions are based on the potential revenue generation relative to costs: “*it's the opportunity that makes the thief. If I get a request from a customer and I see that a specific tool can help me and that in relation to what I've invoiced I'm going to make money, it's really a rule of 3, you see. That's when I take it*”. This strategy allows agencies to tailor budget allocations and ensure that AI tools are adopted based on their potential returns on investment.

Then, as underlined by person 2, it is very complicated to structure and define a clear budget due to the recency and frequent updates of artificial intelligence tools. Employee 4 completes this thought by adding that “[*they*] *don't have a defined budget and clearly, the more [they] can*

test as many AIs as possible, the better it is. [...] for example, one of the AIs [they] paid the most for, [they were] billed for it again today [...]".

Finally, respondents underscore the variability of budgets based on customer preferences and financial situations. Consequently, agencies must maintain cost flexibility to ensure proper allocation of funds, as confirmed by employee 20: *"it depends a lot on the situation. Every customer is different, so each budget is adapted to the customer's requirements"*. This client-needs-based approach facilitates the adoption of AI solutions that enhance productivity and profitability, even within rigid budgetary constraints.

4.5.2. Affordable Options

Despite the significant investments by some agencies such as firm B, others adopt a more resourceful approach by leveraging low-cost and free AI tools. This strategy allows them to benefit from AI capabilities while optimising their budgets. Person 1 mentions using free tools to accomplish tasks, demonstrating a preference for cost-efficient options when available.

Similarly, person 11 highlights the affordability of ChatGPT, which makes it easier for agencies to invest in such tools without substantial financial burdens. More generally, the accessibility and affordability of certain GAI tools ensure that agencies of varying sizes can still incorporate AI functionalities. Person 6 acknowledges the democratic pricing of GAI tools, and employee 12 indicates that *"[...] on [their] scale, honestly, it doesn't cost [them] much"*.

This strategic use of free tools and the affordability of paying ones enables all kind of agencies to innovate and remain competitive within budget constraints. Person 7 concludes the general thought by saying that *"it's never been a hindrance"*.

4.6. Training

From internal training sessions and partnerships with external firms to autonomous learning and informal knowledge sharing, agencies employ diverse methodologies to empower their employees and ensure a comprehensive development of their AI skills.

4.6.1. Training Initiatives

Agencies are investing in training initiatives to familiarise employees with AI tools. Person 2 states that these training programs cover various topics, including *"[...] 'how to use artificial intelligence?', 'how to develop a network?', 'how to use machine learning?', 'what modules exist?'"*. Respondent 3 also mentions that *"[they] have an internal academy, [...] which*

provides internal and external training, and they have started to develop training on AI, precisely". Additionally, interviewee 13 highlights a systematic approach: *"[...] we already have a platform, an environment for training and supporting our teams [...] so it's a micro-learning and e-learning platform [...]"*. This approach ensures employees are educated on AI technologies, enabling them to integrate these tools into their daily operations.

However, agencies face challenges in implementing comprehensive programs. Person 5 highlights the variability in training needs based on functions within the agency: *"we still have a training issue, and the difficulty is that it depends on the positions [...]"*. Moreover, smaller agencies emphasise time constraints as a barrier to prioritising training initiatives: participant 19 notes that *"[...] [they're] a small agency and [they] have to be everywhere, on all fronts, so [they] don't have much time to train [themselves], but clearly, it should be a priority for [them]"*. These examples indicate a need for more flexible and accessible training solutions that can cater to diverse employee needs and constraints.

Despite these challenges, some agencies are making significant progress. Person 8 shares an example: *"the entire company was invited to attend a training session, [...] people were doing tests, and the training lasted for two hours"*. Decision-maker 17 also notes recent training sessions: *"[...] we've already taken part in a training session a few weeks ago [...]"*. These efforts illustrate the commitment of agencies to embrace AI and its potential benefits.

4.6.2. External Partnerships

To complement internal training initiatives, Belgian marketing and consulting agencies strategically leverage external partnerships to access specialized training courses and certifications. Person 7 highlights their interest in partnerships: *"[...] we list the training courses of all our partners, because basically we are partners with Google, Meta, Spot, etc. and so this gives us access to the training courses they give, some free and some paying."* This collaborative approach reflects a proactive strategy in the development of AI skills.

Some agencies collaborate with AI technology providers to offer specialized training sessions, with person 17 mentioning that they have followed *"[...] a training session [...] on AI within the Adobe suite"*. This not only enhances the technical competencies of employees but also ensures they take the best out of the tools that already use in their working routine. Moreover, investing in certifications underscores the commitment of agencies to enhance employee competencies in AI-related domains. Employee 7 emphasizes the agency's readiness to invest in certifications: *"but if there are certifications, the agency doesn't mind at all paying for them"*.

4.6.3. Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning emerges as a significant approach within agencies, where employees take the initiative to self-educate and explore AI concepts independently. Insights from interviews highlight the diverse ways in which individuals engage in autonomous learning processes. Decision-maker 1 exemplifies this independent approach, stating that “*[they are] someone who tends to be a lot on social networks watching what is happening*”.

Moreover, person 2 underscores the widespread adoption of autonomous learning within their agency by stating that “*everyone [there] is attracted to it*” and declaring that “*some have naturally self-taught training with tutorials on YouTube or on websites, regardless of the medium*”. Still within firm B, employee 3 describes an agency culture that emphasizes independence: “*[...] we're all pretty independent, it's a bit about resourcefulness, we all help each other out, but in the process, we all kind of figure things out on our own, so in the same logic, it follows a bit like that for artificial intelligence: we all do our own research [...]*”.

While autonomous learning is prevalent, there is recognition of the need for structured training as agencies continue to grow. Person 4 acknowledges this need: “*but for the moment, I have not yet set up any training or other. I think it may be something that, if the agency continues to grow well in the coming years, will gradually indeed need to be put in place [...]*”. This suggests that, as agencies expand, there may be a shift towards more structured training programs to support ongoing skill development.

4.6.4. Informal Knowledge Sharing

Informal knowledge sharing is essential to fostering a collaborative learning environment within agencies. Person 1 highlights the collaborative approach to knowledge dissemination, stating that “*through [their] investments in artificial intelligence, [their] two collaborators have access to it indirectly*”. Also, participant 3 emphasizes the dynamic nature of knowledge sharing: “*[...] when we find something interesting, we share it with everyone [...]*”. These examples reflect agency cultures where resources and tools are shared to facilitate learning.

Furthermore, person 4 underscores the importance of sharing experiences and insights: “*I made sure to share this interest with them and make them understand how it can facilitate their work*”. This dynamic exchange of ideas occurs through spontaneous interactions and informal gatherings, as described by respondent 17: “*[...] it's more advice that we give over the shoulder than really formal meetings*”. Such interactions contribute to a culture of continuous learning, where employees collaborate to share knowledge and best practices.

4.7. Benefits

By incorporating artificial intelligence into their working processes, marketing and consulting agencies enjoy diverse benefits, from time saving to cost reductions or even creative enhancements with AI serving as a source of inspiration. In this section, a wide range of advantages related to the adoption of AI are developed, enabling a better understanding of the reasoning behind the decision of the aforementioned agencies to use AI tools.

4.7.1. Resource Optimisation

The use of AI for resource optimisation is pivotal in Belgian marketing and consulting agencies. AI tools automate mundane tasks, freeing up time for more valuable activities. Respondent 1 notes that AI enables them to “*[...] spend more time on things that bring more value back to the business*”. Similarly, person 5 describes AI as “*[...] a means to make our lives easier on basic tasks or tasks with low added value*”, highlighting its role in simplifying low-value tasks.

AI also enhances creativity by offloading tedious work, as decision-maker 7 emphasizes, allowing employees to focus on higher-value tasks: “*above all, to be able to free up our creative minds for tasks with much greater added value than just creating tons of emails or digesting tons of documents*”. Additionally, AI compensates “*[...] for shortages in human resources*”, as person 14 mentioned, and enables “*[...] design and production that no longer requires several people [...]*”, as noted by interviewee 20.

4.7.2. Efficiency Gains

AI implementation yields substantial efficiency gains, leading to improved performance. Respondents consistently highlighted AI's role in boosting productivity, with person 2 noting that AI delivers “*[...] a productivity gain*” and decision-maker 5 emphasising that “*[...] it can make [them] more productive*”. Additionally, respondent 14 declares that “*[...] teams are highly agile, highly skilled and much more efficient in terms of productivity*”.

AI also simplifies processes, allowing teams to focus on strategic priorities. Person 16 outlines AI's “*[...] facilitating aspect, simplifying perhaps at times [...]*”. Participant 4 highlights AI's role in “*[...] facilitating internal processes [...]*”, while person 8 outlines its ability to optimise operations, thus enabling employees to allocate time effectively and concentrate on high-value tasks. Moreover, AI contributes to improved problem-solving, with employee 7 discussing how AI helps to synthesise and rewrite content, streamlining the process of organising ideas.

4.7.3. Time Gains

AI implementation offers significant time-saving benefits, enabling professionals to accomplish tasks more efficiently. Numerous respondents highlighted AI's role in saving time across various operational aspects. Participant 1 notes *“in my personal case and even with [Company A], I use artificial intelligence a lot to save time”*. Similarly, person 4 describes AI as *“clearly a time-saver”* and respondent 19 states that *“the advantage, for [them], is that it saves [them] time, [...] that's the biggest advantage”*, reflecting its impact on reducing task completion times.

Moreover, AI facilitates rapid information retrieval and analysis, enabling professionals to access insights and make decisions more swiftly. Employee 3 highlights how AI tools *“[...] [help them] to go faster in terms of [their] thinking”* and to be quicker: *“[...] it almost directly gives me the text I want, in the way I want, because I asked it to, so it's much faster”*. Additionally, decision-maker 6 points out that *“AI will offer you directly what you ask for”* and outlined that *“[...] it's a tool that saves [them] time”*.

4.7.4. Financial Gains

The integration of AI technologies can lead to financial benefits, contributing to increased profitability and cost savings. Several respondents highlighted AI's role in enhancing financial performance within their organisations, with person 1 and person 6 emphasising financial gains and profitability as a key benefit of AI implementation.

Moreover, person 7 notes that AI *“[...] has helped [them] to grow the agency faster”* and that *“[...] it costs less because [they] go faster [...]”*. Person 17 notes that *“[...] it's a cost-saving measure, plain and simple”*, particularly in comparison to traditional approaches: *“so, when you compare the cost of an employee or a photographer or things like that, it's still interesting in some cases”*. Also, participant 18 states that AI allows agencies *“[...] to achieve financial results that are perhaps more significant with fewer staff [...]”*. These examples demonstrate AI's capacity to enhance overall cost efficiency, resulting in improved financial outcomes.

4.7.5. Source of Inspiration

AI serves as a valuable source of inspiration, fostering creativity and expanding horizons. Participant 6 outlines this, by stating that *“another significant advantage is the source of inspiration”*. Similarly, decision-maker 11 notes that *“[...] it opens up perspectives that [they] didn't necessarily think of: it's a bit like a huge encyclopaedia, so if [they] ask the right questions, [...] it really opens up horizons that [they] didn't necessarily have before, and [they]*

think that's always very enriching". These responses outline AI's capacity to spark new ideas and perspectives.

Moreover, AI facilitates idea generation and content development by providing valuable suggestions and insights. Interviewee 13 describes AI as a "[...] *facilitator, accelerator, and coach on a number of topics, helping to avoid starting with a blank page syndrome, challenging various contents, and enhancing relevance [...]*". Additionally, person 15 notes that AI enables individuals with lower levels of creativity to contribute with unique and compelling ideas.

4.7.6. Quality Improvement

AI enhances the quality of work by providing valuable assistance to marketing and consulting agencies. Respondent 1 emphasizes that AI should be "[...] *taken as a solution that facilitates and improves work*". Additionally, interviewee 6 highlights AI's ability to ensure high-quality outcomes by "[...] *[responding] to your request, and what's more, [refining] it quickly*".

Furthermore, AI plays a crucial role in improving the quality of writing and content creation. Employee 3 outlines "*the quality of writing [...]*" of artificial intelligence and stated that interactions with AI-driven platforms like ChatGPT aid in enhancing writing styles and thinking processes. Similarly, person 11 highlights AI's contribution to enhancing "[...] *the quality of deliverables, whether it's design or written content*", underscoring its role in elevating the overall quality of work produced by agencies.

Moreover, AI aids in interpretation and communication, leading to more effective communication strategies and marketing campaigns. Employee 8 emphasizes AI's role in providing better interpretations of data and information, which in turn leads to more efficient communication strategies and improved outcomes for clients. Likewise, respondent 13 states that "[...] *sometimes AI is much more effective than humans at finding the right messages in mailings to improve performance*".

4.8. Competition & Competitive Advantage

4.8.1. Competitive Advantage

Belgian marketing and consulting agencies leverage AI as a strategic tool to gain a competitive edge in the industry. Several respondents emphasized the pivotal role of AI in levelling the playing field between small and large companies. Respondent 1 highlights how AI enables smaller agencies to compete with industry giants by delivering high-quality content: "*I think it also brings a competitive advantage because pushing more of these types of tools allows us as*

a small company to position ourselves to provide content that is sometimes as good from an external point of view as a large company". This sentiment underscores the democratising effect of AI, allowing agencies of all sizes to deliver impactful solutions to clients.

Furthermore, interviewee 2 emphasizes AI's potential *"[...] to strengthen [their] presence in the market, which [they] see as the long-term benefit of using artificial intelligence"*. In addition to market presence, AI offers agencies the opportunity to optimise pricing strategies and deliver cost-effective solutions to clients: decision-maker 4 highlights this aspect, stating that *"[...] it also allows [them] to offer prices much lower than the market price"*. Nevertheless, participant 18 states that *"[...] the conveyed value of your integration of artificial intelligence must be completely and fairly easily understandable for your client"* in order for AI to truly lead to a competitive edge.

4.8.2. Competitor Comparison

Interviewees assess their AI integration and use relative to competitors with varying perspectives, reflecting a nuanced landscape of industry positioning and technological advancement. Some respondents express confidence in their agency's AI capabilities, positioning themselves as frontrunners in the adoption of AI technologies. Respondent 4 states confidently that *"clearly, [they] think [they] are in the more advanced part compared to the others"*, while person 3 echoes this sentiment, declaring that *"[...] [they] think [they] are really on track, [they] are quite aligned with competitors, even ahead in some areas [...]"*.

Conversely, other respondents acknowledge the challenges in accurately gauging their agency's position relative to competitors due to the multifaceted nature of AI integration and use. Employee 16 expresses uncertainty, stating that *"[...] where we stand compared to the competition, I don't know [...]"*. Additionally, person 12 states that *"unfortunately, [they] don't have the time to explore the competition in depth"*. These examples underscore the complexity of evaluating AI adoption comprehensively among competitors.

Furthermore, while stating that *"[...] [they] don't think other competitors in Belgium have an advantage"*, respondent 9 warns against immobility, declaring that *"[...] if [they] don't get serious about it, then [they'll] incur a delay that will be damaging in the medium term [...]"*. Also, decision-maker 1 elaborates on a comparison implying a potential drop in quality as a result of efficiency gains; indeed, although AI enables a rapid and cost-effective approach to content creation, *"the question then is: will my video created by AI be as qualitative as that of my direct competitor?"*.

4.9. Downsides, Risks & Reluctance

While the integration of generative artificial intelligence tools in content creation processes offers numerous benefits such as enhanced efficiency, cost savings, and the ability to handle large volumes of work, it also presents several challenges and drawbacks. Indeed, the adoption of AI is not without various difficulties and concerns.

4.9.1. AI Complexities

4.9.1.1 Integration Problems

Agencies face several challenges in integrating GAI tools. Some of these difficulties stem from the need to invest time in research and development to ensure alignment with the desired direction and to achieve mastery in AI use. Person 2 states that *“one thing that can also be rather negative in relation to AI is that, despite everything, it is absolutely essential to define R&D times. What [they] mean by this is that if you don't master or if you don't know what you want to do, you know you're going in one direction, but you don't know which path to take”*.

Moreover, you must assign different AI tools to specific job roles, which is, at the current stage of AI development, an important challenge for companies as explained by participant 5: *“[...] the difficulty is that it depends on the positions, well the functions, the roles, it's different [...]”*. Then, navigating through the multitude of tools available to find the best one is time-consuming as suggested by person 19: *“also, the fact that there are so many offers and possibilities, we have to manage to find what suits us in our business, not everything is necessarily useful”*.

Furthermore, employees need time to adjust to AI tools, as expressed still by participant 5: *“[...] I think it's a bit, at least for the current stage of AI, it still requires an approach, an effort, or a reflex. We may have all the tools we need, but people have to make them their own”*.

4.9.1.2 Use Difficulties

After recent AI advancements, individuals are now realising the complexity involved in mastering GAI tools. In the opinion of interviewee 14, this may be due to a lack of skills. They quote: *“[...] lack of self-training, so I would say [difficulties] on the learning aspect, and on the mastery aspect”*. As a result, there could be a feeling of powerlessness, as participant 17 highlights: *“[...] maybe there's also the disappointment of saying ‘I can't do exactly what I want to do’ [...]”*.

Furthermore, generative AI tools require precise and well-formulated prompts for effective use. Respondents note that poorly formulated prompts can lead to unsatisfactory outputs, causing frustration and inefficiency. Indeed, decision-maker 3 states: “[...] *I would say that if it is poorly formulated, I have already seen many colleagues with whom I have worked directly and I saw them formulate on Chat and it was not the right way to formulate and so they were annoyed [...] I would say if you don't know how to use it and address Chat properly, it won't work. So, you need to have a minimum understanding of how to use it*”. The challenge, according to person 12, lies in crafting high-quality prompts that ensure desirable results, emphasising the need for a deep understanding of how to interact with GAI tools.

Moreover, continuous updates and the rapid evolution of GAI technologies demand constant adaptation, as respondent 16 explains: “[...] *then your tool, a month later or a little later, becomes obsolete or is surpassed by another, etc., and there you go, always keeping up to date*”. As expressed by decision-maker 19, this can be time-consuming and lead to discouragement. They quote: “[...] *you have to keep up to date all the time, it takes time and so every time you feel like you're up to date, there are new things coming out*”.

4.9.1.3 Efficiency Loss

Consequently, while AI is designed to enhance efficiency, “[when] working on a business case that [hasn't been] mastered, it can [result in a] waste [of] a lot of time”, as mentioned by participant 2. Moreover, Respondent 17 highlights the trial-and-error nature of working with AI. In addition, person 19 argues that “*in the end, the time [they] save in serving clients, well, [they] 'lose' it for training [themselves], keeping up with trends, seeing how things evolve, staying up to date*”. Indeed, the constant need to stay updated with the latest advancements is a time-consuming process and may offset the time savings achieved through AI.

4.9.2. AI Incapacities

4.9.2.1 Substandard Quality

GAI tools often fall short in creativity compared to human efforts. Most of the respondents highlight that AI-generated visual content, such as logos and design work, lacks the quality and originality of human creations. This limitation is particularly evident in tasks requiring high creativity and abstract thinking, as underlined by person 13: “[...] *generative AI is not yet capable of achieving this level of abstraction and recurrence, regardless of the topics, of always having the same editorial line*”. Additionally, participant 7 agrees and completes this thought

by stating that *“at least at the moment, especially when you work in the design world, you can see it. [They] see it straight away when it's done with AP”*.

In addition, AI's lower quality could even be responsible for worsening company results. According to employee 20, *“[...] [they] have the impression that using AI in an unproven way can lead [...] to major mistakes [...]”*. This is reinforced by company L's declaration: *“[...] when we read some of the major e-commerce sites that have used ChatGPT, they have experienced a drop in natural referencing. So, there's this question where we ask ourselves, 'should we use it?' because in the end, we won't have the desired impact”*.

4.9.2.2 Content Uniformisation

In the long-term run, the use of AI can lead to the uniformisation of content, reducing originality and diversity. Respondent 12 argues that *“for [them], it's standardisation”* and that *“[they'd] say it's a form of industrialisation of creativity”*. Likewise, person 20 expresses concern regarding the fact that AI-generated visuals and texts tend to be standardized, which can diminish the uniqueness and distinctive features of the agency's work.

4.9.2.3 Necessity for Human Validation

Ultimately, AI's lower quality and inevitable uniformisation of content lead to a need for human verification. Agencies must employ skilled personnel to validate AI outputs in order to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. The importance of maintaining a critical mind and independent examination when using AI-generated content is underscored by multiple respondents, like person 4 who declares: *“and even if we implemented an AI, it still needs someone, the person who will own this task of having the AI handle the writing before validating these texts, that person must still be competent and know as much as I do, for example, as an expert in the field to validate the task”*. This example highlights the need for a critical oversight to maintain quality and reliability, as AI can produce incorrect results.

4.9.3. Employee Reluctance

4.9.3.1 Mistrust

Employee mistrust towards GAI tools is a notable barrier to their adoption. This mistrust stems from concerns such as the one suggested by person 7 that *“[they] don't manage the data, it's not stored with [them]”* or the fact that there's *“[...] only a partial control of what [they] do [...]”*, as underlined by interviewee 14. There is also *“the feeling of not being up to date or of having to deal with new innovations, and so on [is really present]”* in person 20's opinion.

4.9.3.2 Negative Reputation

The use of AI in content creation can impact the reputation of agencies. Person 3 argues that *“if it's misused, it can quickly become an inconvenience, because there are people who know their stuff and can see 'he used AI to reply to my e-mail, that's disrespectful'”*. The reputation of GAI itself remains mixed, with some viewing it as a tool for cheating or producing low-quality outputs. However, interviewee 11 highlights the importance of the agency role in this situation: *“I think that, at least currently, it still has the reputation it has, that will change, but we need to be able to present it well”*.

4.9.3.3 Work Devaluation

AI's ability to automate content creation poses a risk of devaluing creative work. Respondents 5 and 6 respectively express their concerns: *“then there's less work as well, but you'll sell for less”* and *“I'll also add that we always say that what's free has no value. But as soon as your customer starts paying a little less, and that's what's going to happen, he'll want to pay even less. Because for them, AI is free and it does everything, whereas it doesn't [...]”*.

Moreover, *“[...] in the long term the profession will be impoverished”*. This is stated by participant 12, who wants to insist on the reduction of the perceived value of creative work. In other words, person 20 argues that *“the risk that [they] see, apart from the loss of the spirit of criticism and development, is simply the habit of having low prices and a perfection that is not necessarily realistic”*.

4.9.3.4 Heavy Dependency

As explained above, there is a risk of developing dependency on AI tools, which can lead to a loss of critical skills and creativity. Respondent 7 highlights this by stating that *“[...] you become dependent on it [...]”*. Maintaining a balance between using GAI for efficiency and preserving essential human skills is crucial to *“[...] avoid the risk of dependency [...]”*, according to person 10.

4.9.3.5 Creativity Killer

There is a prevailing fear that AI may stifle human creativity in the workplace. Both older and younger respondents express concerns that reliance on AI could lead to a loss of fundamental skills and creative thinking, like person 16 and person 18, who respectively declare: *“[...] it's a fear of an old fool perhaps, to think that you're going to make your own things work less because we're going to bring you so many things that are already done [...] and that maybe you won't immediately engage your brain [...] because it's being done a little for you and maybe you're*

not thinking” and “the danger for me is the lack of personal creativity that you won't involve anymore because you have an AI. It's the same if you buy an electric scooter, you'll never walk again because it's super easy, you'll go left, right, etc. the result will have an impact on your health in the medium term”. In other words, the risk of becoming overly dependent on AI could result in diminished personal creativity and a decline in the quality of creative outputs.

4.9.3.6 Fear of Being Replaced

The most severe mistrust is the fear of being replaced by AI, representing a significant concern among employees. While some view GAI as a tool for assistance, like person 8 who argues that *“it's not seen at all as a threat, it's mainly seen as an opportunity”*, others worry about the potential for AI to replace human roles, particularly in content creation and design. For instance, interviewee 6 declares that *“[they] refuse to use [generated content] as it is because it equates to killing the copywriting profession for text or the creative or designer profession”*.

On the other hand, according to decision-maker 1: *“it's the whole question of digitalisation, also called uberisation (which means that digitalisation and artificial intelligence will replace jobs). Yes, that's the case. I think it will eventually replace them, but it will also create new ones”*. Likewise, person 14 declares that: *“the reality is that it really depends on what sector you're in when it comes to marketing. Roughly speaking, those in the marketing trade base what I'd rather call communications companies who sell themselves as marketing companies. In reality, these people are stuck on community management and content creation. These people really do need to worry about themselves, in the long term, but not in the medium or short term, because for them, that's where AI is most effective”*. Despite new jobs being potentially created, the uncertainty about the future impact of AI on employment remains a source of reluctance.

4.9.3.7 Ethical Considerations

Some respondents mention that AI-generated content raises significant intellectual property concerns. They highlight the need to address the ownership of rights when creating images or music with AI. The current legal framework surrounding intellectual property for AI-generated content is complex and unclear, posing a major issue for agencies using these technologies. For instance, decision-maker 13 states that *“[...] a major blind spot that is unique to generative AIs today is intellectual property. So, today there is a real big issue with the intellectual property of training data and output data, as training data is subject to intellectual property rights, and what comes out is not subject to intellectual property rights [...]”*.

5. Discussion

In this section, we compare secondary data from the literature with primary data collected during our interviews. We aim to address our ten hypotheses, providing results to either confirm or refute each of them. For the sake of clarity, we follow the same structure as the previous section, with our eight research themes serving as sections and the corresponding hypotheses highlighted at the start of each discussion.

5.1. *Use of AI*

The integration of GAI tools in Belgian marketing and consulting agencies has shown varied adoption and impact across different company sizes and demographics. While the hypothesis that the majority of companies now incorporate AI into their marketing strategies is validated by our findings, the one stating that the size of a company influences AI integration into marketing processes is refuted. Firms of various sizes, from small startups such as firm 1 to large multinational agencies like company G, have adopted AI tools, indicating a democratisation of AI technology that allows access to businesses regardless of their scale.

Our findings therefore indicate that even smaller firms with limited resources are successfully integrating AI, aligning with recent studies showing the accessibility of AI technologies to businesses of all sizes. However, this is in contrast with the literature, which suggests a positive correlation between firm size and technology adoption due to the financial and technical resources available to larger organisations (Alsheibani et al., 2018).

Furthermore, our findings also contradict the hypothesis suggesting that younger professionals are more likely to use GAI tools in marketing strategies. Indeed, while age can have an impact on the way in which AI is adopted, professionals from all across the age spectrum, that is from 21 to 65, are actively using AI in their marketing strategies. Younger professionals tend to be more experimental and innovative with AI applications, often integrating the latest tools and techniques quickly. In contrast, older professionals might adopt a more cautious and strategic approach, focusing on integrating AI in ways that enhance existing processes and decision-making capabilities. Nonetheless, the widespread use of AI across age groups underscores its impact and the broad acceptance of its utility in marketing.

These results of our study corroborate existing literature that highlights the transformative impact of AI in marketing. Chintalapati & Pandey (2022) and Sestino & De Mauro (2021) have emphasised AI's role in enhancing decision-making capabilities and automating complex tasks, a sentiment echoed by our interviewees.

5.2. *Decision to Use AI*

The decision to start using generative artificial intelligence is influenced by a complex interplay of internal motivations and external pressures. Our findings challenge the hypothesis that the integration of AI into marketing strategies is predominantly driven by external pressures. Instead, our data indicate that both internal and external factors play significant roles in the decision to adopt AI technologies.

Externally, the competitive landscape and evolving industry standards are major drivers for GAI adoption. The literature supports this, noting a paradigm shift towards extreme content personalisation driven by AI technologies (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022). This shift is also propelled by a fundamental transformation in market dynamics, where the need for businesses to leverage AI-powered insights to enhance customer engagement and marketing efficacy is becoming more important than simply maximising returns on investment (Kumar et al., 2019). Our interviews confirm these findings, with several respondents highlighting the necessity to adopt AI to remain competitive. Indeed, in their opinion, a new revolution is profiling, and consequently, a communication agency that refuses to integrate GAI risks shutting down.

Additionally, Shaik (2023) explains that client expectations also contribute to the imperative for GAI integration. However, only one interviewee confirmed being driven by customer demands, while the majority of those who elaborated on it actually stated that customers do not request AI to be used. Therefore, with regard to client expectations as an external pressure, our results deviate from the existing literature.

Internally, the decision to integrate AI is often driven by the desire to enhance operational productivity and optimise resource allocation. Indeed, our findings reveal that efficiency improvements and upper management initiatives are significant drivers of AI integration. These results align with the literature, which highlights the pivotal role of top management in fostering AI adoption (Alsheibani et al., 2018), and reflect the broader industry trend towards AI-powered marketing solutions that augment efficiency (Jain & Aggarwal, 2020).

Moreover, employee interest and expertise relative to AI also play a crucial role in the adoption process. Several interviewees, like decision-makers 7 and 12, expressed the passion from some employees for AI and its potential applications, explaining that GAI tools were discovered and integrated due to the initiative of a passionate employee. This emphasises how individual enthusiasm can drive GAI integration within companies.

Our findings thus present a more nuanced view of AI adoption in marketing and consulting agencies, showing that while external pressures are significant, internal motivations are equally crucial. The balance of these factors varies across companies, reflecting their unique strategic objectives and operational contexts.

5.3. Roles & Tasks

Generative artificial intelligence tools are playing an increasingly crucial role within agencies. Our results confirm the hypothesis that AI tools are multitasking across various roles, reshaping the marketing landscape by handling diverse and complex functions. These AI applications cover the entire content creation process, from brainstorming to content generation and optimisation, and significantly enhance the efficiency and scope of marketing operations.

The role of AI in text generation and copywriting is key in agencies. As participants pointed out, GAI tools are employed almost daily for content creation. For example, one respondent noted that well-prompted GAI is frequently used for writing tasks, and another confirmed its widespread use for copywriting, which outlines its blend of efficiency and creativity. This aligns with the literature, where Arasu et al. (2020) and Korzyński et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of well-crafted prompts to ensure relevant and tailored AI-generated text.

GAI is also leveraged for UX content optimisation, with the aim of enhancing the user experience. Respondents mentioned GAI's role in creating SEO-friendly website content, improving both search engine visibility and user engagement. The literature supports this, highlighting AI's influence on web design (Haleem et al., 2022) and performance optimisation (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022). Moreover, GAI tools also facilitate translation tasks, breaking down language barriers and enhancing communication efficiency. Interviewees noted the utility of AI in handling multilingual content, which aligns with findings from Anantrasirichai & Bull (2021) on AI's ability to eliminate language-related obstacles through machine translation.

Generative AI is increasingly used for creating images, videos, and audio content. Some agencies use AI tools to enhance creative processes and produce high-quality visuals and auditory content. This increased use of AI in content creation can be justified by the insights of Wahid et al. (2023), which highlight AI's ability to simplify the generation of various content types, from informative to emotive and transactional. Furthermore, while some agencies perceive and use AI simply as a source of inspiration for their outputs, others, as noted by Benbya et al. (2024), emphasise AI's capability in text-to-image generation, therefore transforming marketing content creation by providing near-final results.

In addition, AI-driven content optimisation is fundamental in these agencies, focusing on enhancing the performance and efficiency of both textual and visual content. Respondents highlighted AI's use in improving deliverables by challenging and upgrading existing content. Tools like Adobe Photoshop, enhanced with AI features, are employed for visual retouching and improvement, ensuring high-performance outputs. Moreover, GAI serves as a valuable tool for idea generation, with participants mentioning AI's role in providing inspiration and structuring ideas, making brainstorming processes more efficient. These insights into the use of AI for content optimisation and brainstorming go beyond existing research, as they are not highlighted in the literature: indeed, Gao et al. (2023) suggested that AI revolves around three main segments: image and video production, copywriting, and content planning.

Finally, AI excels in data analysis, providing insights that drive decision-making and strategic planning. Respondents emphasised AI's importance in understanding consumer behaviour and synthesising data effectively. Interviewees also highlighted AI's role in generating predictive insights and optimising marketing content based on trend analysis. This is supported by Ahn et al. (2022) and Nir Kshetri et al. (2023), who discuss AI's pivotal role in delivering targeted advertising and enhancing overall marketing effectiveness through detailed data insights gathered in vast databases (Arasu et al., 2020).

5.4. Budget

The integration of generative artificial intelligence appears to be largely unaffected by budget constraints, confirming the hypothesis that the budget for AI tools does not constitute a significant barrier to entry for companies, thereby facilitating widespread adoption. This accessibility is not only made possible by the overall affordability of GAI tools, but also by the existence of diverse budgetary approaches, with some agencies favouring flexibility while others implement a more structured philosophy.

Agencies employ different strategies to manage their AI budgets. Larger agencies and those part of global groups often adopt a structured approach, allocating specific budgets for AI tools and employee training. Conversely, many agencies opt for a flexible approach to AI budgeting, characterised by the absence of predefined budgets, which allows them to adjust their degree of AI integration according to their financial constraints. This wide range of approaches highlights the opportunity for agencies to tailor their AI adoption to their budgetary needs, which corroborates the literature, as it echoes Haleem et al.'s (2022) claims that AI, once reserved for large corporations, is now accessible to medium- and small-sized businesses.

Moreover, several agencies decide to leverage free and low-cost AI tools to optimise their budgets. This resourceful approach enables companies of all sizes to benefit from AI capabilities without incurring heavy financial burdens. Employee 1 mentioned the use of free tools for task accomplishment, demonstrating a preference for cost-efficient options. Person 11 highlighted the affordability of ChatGPT, making it easier for agencies to invest in such tools without significant financial strain. The general affordability and democratic pricing of GAI tools, as acknowledged by decision-makers 6 and 12, ensure that even smaller agencies can incorporate AI functionalities.

These findings align with the majority of existing literature, which underscores the democratisation of AI resources. Indeed, although Tarapata (2023) suggested that financial considerations might influence AI adoption among small businesses, indicating a potential barrier for those with limited resources, Nir Kshetri et al. (2023) and Taulli (2023) noted the affordability of GAI tools, positioning AI as a game-changer for small enterprises seeking to expand their reach globally. In addition, Wen et al. (2022) argued that, while AI investments may initially seem expensive, they ultimately offer a more efficient and precise advertising method, aligning with the sentiments of other researchers regarding AI's transformative potential.

5.5. Training

Training initiatives are crucial for maintaining operational efficiency in an ever-evolving technological landscape. Our findings partially support the hypothesis that companies organise training programs to ensure their employees are up-to-date with the latest AI advancements. Various methodologies are implemented, including not only training sessions organised internally or in collaboration with external firms, as outlined in the hypothesis, but also autonomous learning and informal knowledge sharing.

With regard to training initiatives, a few agencies mention investments aimed at developing the workforce's AI competencies. For instance, interviewees from company B point out that their internal academy now offers AI-specific training and that employees are trained on a wide range of subjects, from AI basics to machine learning modules. Also, as noted by person 7, external partnerships offer valuable training opportunities through access to courses and certifications. These responses demonstrate agencies' desire to optimise AI use by training their workforce, thus corroborating the literature: Shaik (2023) highlighted the importance of continuous competency enhancement and forward-thinking strategies to optimally use new technologies.

Nonetheless, various challenges remain, notably in tailoring training to specific job functions and managing time constraints, as noted by respondents 5 and 19, respectively. These issues hinder both internal and external structured training sessions, thereby encouraging other learning methods. On the one hand, autonomous learning plays an important role in AI skills development: workers willingly educate themselves, using resources such as social media and YouTube tutorials, as stated by respondents 1 and 2. On the other hand, informal knowledge sharing strengthens employees' overall AI expertise, with participants 3, 4 and 17 mentioning this collaborative approach of sharing interesting findings with colleagues.

These findings complement the literature by underscoring that, in the absence of agency-organised training programs, other methods enable employees to stay up-to-date and improve their AI competencies. While a structured approach to training guarantees all employees equal access to AI skills improvement, autonomous learning and informal information sharing can push their learning further, encouraging them to engage with the subject, and be of particular interest to agencies facing constraints in the implementation of training programs.

5.6. Benefits

The adoption of artificial intelligence offers substantial benefits. Our findings validate the hypothesis that AI integration enhances marketing efficiency by both saving time and optimising resource allocation. These advantages position AI as a crucial tool for maintaining competitiveness and achieving operational excellence in the marketing and consulting sectors.

By allowing the workforce to carry out activities with greater efficiency, the use of AI provides major time-saving advantages. Several participants, such as 1, 4 and 19, point out AI's ability to save time, describing it as a key benefit. As noted by participants 3 and 6, workers have faster access to information and can act more quickly thanks to AI technology, which accelerates the search for and analysis of data. These findings emphasise time economies as one of AI's main advantages, thus confirming the literature: in line with Nir Kshetri et al.'s (2023) claims about AI's capacity to decrease time requirements, Wu & Monfort (2022) and Ahn et al. (2022) also showed that better efficiency can be obtained by integrating AI into marketing strategies, as it allows for faster turnaround times.

AI's role in resource optimisation is essential: by automating repetitive tasks, AI tools enable employees to focus on higher-value activities, as declared by respondents 1 and 5. Moreover, participant 7 states that, in doing so, AI enhances creativity by allowing employees to focus on tasks that require more intellectual engagement. Also, AI makes it possible to alleviate workforce shortages and reduce the number of employees needed for certain tasks, as noted by decision-makers 14 and 20, respectively. Optimising resource allocation is therefore a key benefit of AI, which validates the hypothesis: AI decreases resource requirements, thereby enhancing efficiency, as detailed by Nir Kshetri et al. (2023).

Furthermore, AI's advantages go far beyond this, as evidenced by our interviews, with a variety of benefits covering a wide range of business aspects. For instance, AI simplifies operations and processes, allowing agencies to increase efficiency and productivity. AI can also improve the quality of work as well as inspire employees, reducing creative blocks and driving them to generate creative ideas. Finally, by reducing costs and enhancing profitability, AI empowers agencies to achieve a better financial performance.

5.7. Competition & Competitive Advantage

The integration of AI in Belgian marketing and consulting agencies is perceived as a critical factor in gaining a competitive edge. Our findings confirm the hypothesis that decision-makers working in companies that integrate GAI in their marketing strategies feel that they gain a significant competitive advantage. We focus here on the interviewees' perception of AI as a competitive advantage, not on a factual analysis of the market.

The potential of AI to offer a competitive edge is recognised among respondents. Smaller agencies, in particular, view AI as a democratising tool that allows them to compete with larger firms, as noted by participant 1. Moreover, decision-makers 2 and 4 respectively note that AI enhances agencies' market presence and allows them to offer more competitive pricing. These findings align with existing literature, which underscores that mobilising AI technologies can allow firms to obtain a competitive advantage (Haleem et al., 2022), a statement consistent with the opinions of the decision-makers we interviewed.

Furthermore, Wu & Monfort (2023) emphasise that an effective deployment of AI technology requires a thorough comprehension of marketing concepts and technological proficiencies. Our interviews align once more with the literature: participant 3 declares that AI can indeed represent an advantage in case it is correctly used by agencies. This reasoning outlines the importance of mastering AI tools in order to effectively leverage them.

Additionally, it is also interesting to note that assessments of AI integration in comparison with competitors reveal varied points-of-view. Certain interviewees, like 3 and 4, are confident that their company presents an advanced AI proficiency, while others, such as 12 and 16, admit to struggling with accurately determining their position compared to others. This reveals a difficulty for some to assess AI adoption across the industry.

5.8. Downsides, Risks & Reluctance

Several challenges and risks arise from the adoption of AI technology. Our findings confirm the hypothesis that, due to the rapid adoption of AI tools in business, there remains a persistent need for human verification. This downside is linked with current AI limitations and is therefore likely to decrease as technology progresses.

Artificial intelligence outputs require human verification, as noted by respondent 13, who emphasised that generative AI struggles with high-level abstraction and consistency. Moreover, employee 20 warns against AI's tendency to produce standardised content, thus negatively impacting the uniqueness of the company's output. These examples prove the need for human validation on AI-produced content, which corroborates the literature: human verification is key to address AI limitations, such as its inability mentioned by Gupta et al. (2024) to consistently deliver results that align completely with the company image.

Furthermore, while the hypothesis focuses primarily on the need for human supervision to compensate AI incapacabilities, such as the risk of content uniformisation, several other downsides are cited by our interviewees. For instance, integration difficulties are often mentioned, leading to a need to invest in R&D on the topic, as well as the complexity of use, such as the need to write prompts adequately in order to obtain the expected results. Moreover, its impact on efficiency and quality, seen by some as a benefit, is questioned by certain interviewees. Employees are also at the source of several reluctances, expressing a certain mistrust regarding AI tools for various reasons, such as the fear of being replaced or seeing their work being devalued. Finally, ethical considerations also have an impact on AI adoption.

5.9. Discussion Summary

The discussion highlights the transformative impact of GAI in marketing and consulting, emphasising several key aspects relevant to managerial implications. GAI integration is widespread across companies of various sizes, driven by the need to improve operational efficiency and optimise resources. This trend suggests that AI technology is becoming more accessible, allowing both small startups and large multinationals to enhance their marketing strategies. The decision to use AI is influenced by a balance of internal motivations and external pressures, indicating that managers must consider both operational improvements and competitive dynamics when integrating AI.

Moreover, GAI tools are being used across various roles, significantly reshaping marketing functions by enhancing efficiency, creativity, and the ability to handle complex tasks. This supports the need for managers to strategically integrate AI into their operations to leverage these benefits. Also, continuous training and skill development are crucial for effective AI integration: managers should therefore implement structured training programs, partner with external organisations for certifications, and encourage autonomous learning and informal knowledge sharing to ensure employees stay updated with the latest AI advancements.

Ultimately, the benefits of AI integration are substantial, including resource optimisation, efficiency gains, time savings, financial benefits, and enhanced creativity. However, the discussion also highlights the importance of addressing challenges such as the complexity of AI integration, potential standardisation issues, and ethical concerns related to data privacy and algorithmic biases. Employee reluctance and the necessity for human validation are additional considerations. Managers must balance automation with human oversight to maintain quality and address potential drawbacks, ensuring a strategic and responsible approach to AI integration that maximises benefits while mitigating risks.

5.10. Managerial Implications

Given the results summarised in the previous section, decision-makers in the marketing and consulting sectors should carefully consider the insights from this study, which underscore the critical importance of embracing GAI technologies. Managers should consider the following key recommendations to effectively integrate and leverage AI tools.

Developing a clear strategy for integrating GAI tools into marketing and consulting operations is essential for ensuring alignment with overall business objectives. Managers should start by identifying specific areas where GAI can add value, such as enhancing customer personalisation or streamlining content creation processes. This strategic approach will enable organisations to prioritise AI investments that deliver the most significant impact, ensuring that AI initiatives support broader corporate goals and drive long-term success.

Then, GAI offers companies substantial opportunities to differentiate themselves in the market by delivering innovative and personalised customer experiences. Executives should leverage AI to analyse customer data and tailor marketing content to individual preferences. By doing so, firms can create more engaging and relevant customer interactions, improving satisfaction and loyalty. As consumer expectations are continually evolving, this competitive advantage gained through GAI tools can be decisive in enabling a company to truly stand out.

Utilising AI to streamline processes and optimise resource allocation can lead to significant efficiency gains and cost savings. AI can automate repetitive tasks, allowing employees to focus on more strategic activities. Leaders should identify high-impact areas where AI can replace manual processes, such as data analysis, content generation, and customer service. This optimisation not only improves operational efficiency but also maximises the return on investment by ensuring resources are deployed where they can achieve the greatest benefits.

Next, implementing a flexible budgeting approach for AI technologies is crucial for ensuring cost-effectiveness while allowing for scalability. Managers should adopt a dynamic budgeting process that accommodates both initial investments and ongoing operational costs. This approach allows companies to respond to new AI developments and scaling needs without being constrained by rigid budget structures. By evaluating the cost-benefit ratio regularly, organisations can ensure that AI investments continue to deliver value over time.

Continuous training and skill development programs are essential for equipping employees with the necessary skills to effectively use GAI tools. Decision-makers should design comprehensive training initiatives that include both technical skills and strategic applications of AI in marketing and consulting. Partnering with AI vendors and educational institutions can enhance these programs and provide industry-recognised certifications. Ensuring that employees are proficient in AI usage will maximise the technology's potential and drive innovation within the organisation.

Furthermore, encouraging a culture that embraces AI and innovation is vital for staying competitive in a rapidly evolving market. Leaders should promote autonomous learning and informal knowledge sharing among employees, fostering an environment where innovation can thrive. Providing access to resources and tools for self-education, as well as encouraging experimentation with AI applications, will help employees stay updated with the latest advancements and contribute to continuous improvement efforts within the company.

While GAI can automate many tasks, maintaining human oversight is crucial to ensure quality and consistency with the firm's brand values. Executives should establish protocols for reviewing and refining AI-generated content to guarantee that it meets the required standards and resonates with the target audience. This balance between automation and human insight ensures that AI serves as an enhancement to human capabilities rather than a replacement, preserving the creativity and emotional intelligence that human input provides.

Additionally, implementing robust data governance frameworks and ethical guidelines is essential to mitigate risks related to data privacy and algorithmic biases. Leaders must ensure that AI applications comply with regulations such as the GDPR and uphold ethical standards in data usage. Transparency in AI operations and regular audits can help build trust with customers and stakeholders. Addressing these concerns proactively will protect the organisation from legal repercussions and enhance its reputation for responsible AI use.

Regularly monitoring and evaluating the performance of GAI tools is critical for ensuring they meet desired objectives and provide a positive return on investment. Decision-makers should establish key performance indicators and conduct periodic assessments to track the effectiveness of AI applications. This continuous evaluation allows organisations to make data-driven decisions about scaling, modifying, or replacing AI tools, ensuring they remain aligned with business goals and deliver sustained value.

Finally, staying abreast of emerging AI trends and technologies is essential for futureproofing the organisation. Managers should invest in scalable AI solutions and foster a culture of innovation that encourages experimentation with new AI applications. By continuously evaluating and updating AI strategies, companies can remain agile and responsive to technological advancements, maintaining a competitive edge in the market. Preparing for future developments ensures that the organisation can capitalise on new opportunities and mitigate potential risks associated with rapid technological change.

5.11. Research Limitations

This study, while comprehensive, is subject to several limitations. For instance, the self-reported nature of the data may introduce biases, as responses are influenced by participants' subjective perceptions and their potential desire to present their firm in a favourable light. This is a critical limitation, given that this paper relies heavily on the data provided during the interviews, which serve as the foundation for our analysis and subsequent discussion.

Moreover, our focus on Belgian marketing and consulting agencies poses restrictions on the generalisability of this paper's findings. At the industry level, while sufficiently large to provide valuable insights, the meagre sample of decision-makers interviewed may limit the extrapolation of our results to other firms belonging to these same two sectors. On a national level, since all our respondents were French speakers, it may be inaccurate to generalise our findings to Flemish speakers, given the major differences between Wallonia and Flanders. From an international perspective, caution should be exercised when extrapolating these results to other countries, as market dynamics and regulatory environments may vary and therefore greatly impact each nation's degree of AI integration.

Finally, the rapid evolution of AI technologies means that our conclusions can quickly become outdated as new tools and practices emerge. AI is a fast-developing field, and continuous advancements may render current applications and insights obsolete, necessitating ongoing research to stay up-to-date with technological changes and their implications. Moreover, there is a lack of research models due to the recency of the topic: the novel nature of GAI integration into the marketing and consulting sectors means that established models and frameworks are scarce. This absence of a robust theoretical foundation can affect the depth and reliability of the analysis, underlining the need for further academic exploration and model development in this emerging field.

5.12. Future Research

Given the limitations identified in the previous section, several avenues for further research exist to enhance our understanding of GAI integration into marketing and consulting. Initially, future studies should target larger samples in order to improve the generalisability of the findings. Accordingly, researchers could opt for quantitative methods, as they can be conducted with the aid of tools that facilitate the analysis of larger volumes of data.

Sample diversity can also be improved, notably by exploring the integration of GAI in other company types and sectors: while this study focuses on marketing and consulting firms, AI's potential benefits and challenges are relevant across a wide range of industries, including healthcare, finance, manufacturing, and retail. Research could examine how different sectors integrate AI technologies, the unique challenges they face, and the specific benefits they gain.

Furthermore, deeper insights into the sustainability of AI-driven strategies can be achieved through longitudinal studies, which could investigate the long-term impacts of GAI adoption on business performance and marketing effectiveness. Moreover, they can adapt to the rapidly changing AI landscape by tracking changes and developments over time, which would allow researchers to identify technology evolutions as well as emerging trends and best practices.

To expand the geographical scope of the research, comparative studies exploring GAI adoption and its impacts across various regions and cultures can be conducted. This would not only reveal unique challenges and opportunities for both academics and practitioners, but also contribute to more generalisable conclusions and better understanding of regional differences in regulatory environments, market conditions, and cultural attitudes towards AI technology.

Another promising area for future research relates to the detailed investigation of the ethical and practical implications of AI use. Future studies should explore how companies can balance the benefits of AI with potential risks such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the displacement of human labour. This can help organisations develop strategies to use AI responsibly and sustainably.

Lastly, this field of study can be enriched by the development of robust research and theoretical frameworks. It is indeed essential to create and validate models that explain the drivers, processes, and outcomes of AI integration, as they can help standardise research approaches and facilitate the comparison of findings across different studies.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, we elaborated on the transformative shift in operational processes and strategic approaches, resulting from the increasing integration of GAI tools in content creation within Belgian marketing and consulting agencies. This research underscores the profound impact of AI on various facets of business operations, with our analysis highlighting several key areas where GAI is making significant contributions and driving change.

Our findings demonstrate that AI adoption is widespread and varied, driven by both internal motivations and external pressures. Despite several challenges, AI tools are enhancing the efficiency, creativity, and personalisation of content, fundamentally transforming how these agencies operate. By understanding the current landscape, embracing strategic implementation, and preparing for future advancements, businesses can harness the full potential of GAI technology to drive innovation and maintain or gain competitive advantage.

This thesis contributes to the academic and practical understanding of AI integration in business contexts. By focusing on Belgian marketing and consulting firms, it fills a significant research gap, providing insights into the regional adoption and impact of AI technologies. These contributions are valuable for both industry and academia, informing managerial practices and laying the groundwork for future explorations in this dynamic field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Table 1 – Interviewees’ Relevant Details

Person	Role	Age	Firm	Firm Size	Firm Age
1	Founder	21-35	A	Micro-firm (3)	4 years
2	Founder	36-50	B	Medium (over 90)	17 years
3	Marketing Manager	21-35	B	Medium (over 90)	17 years
4	Founder	21-35	C	Micro-firm (5)	5 years
5	CEO	36-50	D	Small (37-38)	25 years
6	Founder CEO	36-50	E	Small (10)	18 years
7	Founder CEO	21-35	F	Small (11)	3 years
8	Belgian Branch CEO	51-65	G	Large (22,000)	13 years
9	Head of Intelligence	21-35	G	Large (22,000)	13 years
10	Broadcast Director	21-35	G	Large (22,000)	13 years
11	Founder	21-35	H	Micro-firm (4)	3 years
12	Founder	51-65	I	Micro-firm (5)	6 years
13	CMO & Innovation Officer	36-50	J	Large (3,300)	27 years
14	Founder	21-35	K	Micro-firm (4)	3 years
15	COO	36-50	L	Small (10)	15 years
16	Creative Director	51-65	M	Medium (over 60)	9 years
17	Digital Art Director	21-35	M	Medium (over 60)	9 years
18	Founder CEO	21-35	N	Micro-firm (7)	3 years
19	Founder	36-50	O	Micro-firm (4)	6 years
20	Project Manager	21-35	P	Medium (52)	20 years

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

First, we would like to state that everything said during this interview will be confidential.

NB: The interview guide is written in English for the sake of our thesis, but the interview can take place either in English or French, depending on your preference.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (shortened to AI) into marketing practices has garnered substantial attention in recent years, reflecting a shift in the landscape of marketing strategies. This interview aims to highlight some key information, experiences, practices from different professional situations, exploring how companies manage the transformative impact of AI on marketing communications.

Introduction:

- Can you present yourself?
 - What's your position?
 - What's your day-to-day job?
- Can you present the company? The sector, the activity, the turnover, the number of employees, the structure and the departments.
- What's your personal opinion about the AI in your job in general?

AI in marketing:

- To what extent do you use AI to deliver marketing content?
 - How long have you been using AI?
 - For which tasks do you use AI?
 - How often do you use it?
- If not, Are/Were you reluctant about using AI in your company? Why?
- Are you (not) afraid of taking part in your own replacement?
 - So, do you think that your personal opinion about AI is in line with the vision of the company? Is it important to you?
- How did you decide to use AI?
 - Did you have internal incentive to use AI? Pressure from above or from employees?
 - Did you have external incentive to use AI? From clients or competitors?
 - How do you discover new AI tools? Is it from employees' research or from another source?

- How do you position yourself in relation to your competitors when it comes to using AI? (early users – late users – a bit in-between)?
 - Do you think that using AI can lead to a competitive advantage?
- Do you allocate a budget to AI? Or does it just depend on which programs/software could be useful?
 - Do you offer trainings to employees?
- What can you tell us about the benefits you perceive when using AI?
- What can you tell us about the risks/negative sides you perceive when using AI?
- Is there something else you would like to share with us?

Appendix 3: Content Analysis

For the sake of clarity, we decided not to insert our horizontal content analysis grid in the ‘Appendices’ section; instead, you can use the link hereafter to consult it: [Analysis Grid](#).

Appendix 4: Table 2 – Research Topics Relating to Hypotheses

Research Themes	Related Hypotheses
Use of AI	Hypothesis 1: The majority of companies now incorporate AI into their marketing strategies. Hypothesis 2: The size of a company influences AI integration into marketing processes. Hypothesis 3: Younger professionals are more likely to use GAI tools in marketing strategies.
Decision to Use AI	Hypothesis 4: The integration of AI into marketing strategies is predominantly driven by external pressures.
Roles & Tasks	Hypothesis 5: AI tools are multitasking across various roles, reshaping the marketing landscape by handling diverse and complex functions.
Budget	Hypothesis 6: The budget for AI tools does not constitute a significant barrier to entry for companies, thereby facilitating widespread adoption.
Training	Hypothesis 7: Companies organise training programs to ensure their employees are up-to-date with the latest AI advancements.
Benefits	Hypothesis 8: AI integration enhances marketing efficiency by saving time. Hypothesis 8b: AI integration enhances marketing efficiency by optimising resource allocation.
Competition & Competitive Advantage	Hypothesis 9: Decision-makers working in companies that integrate GAI in their marketing strategies feel that they gain a significant competitive advantage.
Downsides, Risks & Reluctance	Hypothesis 10: Due to the rapid adoption of AI tools in business, there remains a persistent need for human verification.