

THE IMPACT OF GENERATIVE AI ON B2B MARKETING PROCESSES: EVIDENCE FROM INDUSTRIAL FIRMS

MIKKO VESTERINEN, JOEL MERO, MIKA SKIPPARI,
HEIKKI KARJALUOTO

University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland
mivijove@jyu.fi, joel.j.mero@jyu.fi, mika.t.t.skippari@jyu.fi, heikki.karjaluoto@jyu.fi

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is transforming marketing, yet its implications for B2B marketing processes and skills remain insufficiently understood, particularly in industrial contexts where AI adoption has lagged. This study examines how GenAI is used in industrial marketing, its impact on B2B marketing processes, and what skills marketers need. Drawing from 43 semi-structured interviews with AI and marketing leaders from multinational industrial firms and technology providers, we map GenAI applications across marketing information management, planning, and implementation, and categorize them by input type and degree of human augmentation. The findings reveal an uneven impact: GenAI affects implementation most, with increasing automation and customization, whereas its use for information management and planning remains largely unsystematic. As automation increases, marketers' roles shift toward market research, strategy formation, and coordinating activities. The study shows how GenAI reshapes B2B marketing processes and associated skill requirements, offering guidance for systematically embedding GenAI in industrial marketing.

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1 Introduction

Marketing is among the business functions most affected by GenAI (Grewal et al., 2025), as its applications span core marketing processes (Hermann & Puntoni, 2025). Customers, for example, increasingly use GenAI to search for information and to interact with firms online (Grewal et al., 2025). Additionally, marketing use cases rank among the highest in organizational value creation (Chui et al., 2023). GenAI offers opportunities to reduce marketing resources and expenses, but also challenges marketers to demonstrate their value for the company (Cillo & Rubera, 2025). As a result, marketing processes and required skills are being reshaped, with priorities shifting from tasks where GenAI outperforms humans to those where human judgment and creativity remain superior (Hermann & Puntoni, 2025). However, the impact of GenAI may differ between B2B and B2C contexts due to fundamental differences between them (Mikalef et al., 2023). While B2B marketers have lagged in AI adoption (Moradi & Dass, 2022), their ability to create value increasingly depends on developing skills that meet evolving requirements.

Although research on GenAI, particularly in industrial marketing, remains nascent, prior studies have provided insights into GenAI's applications and broader marketing implications (Chan & Choi, 2025; Grewal et al., 2025; Kshetri et al., 2024). However, none have systematically addressed the use of GenAI in industrial marketing, its impact on B2B marketing processes, and the skills required of marketers. To fill this gap, this study addresses three research questions: (1) In what ways is GenAI used in industrial marketing? (2) How does GenAI influence B2B marketing processes, and how are these expected to develop? (3) What skills must industrial marketers possess to (a) adopt and integrate GenAI, and (b) manage its impact on B2B marketing processes?

This study is based on 43 interviews with three groups: industrial marketing managers, AI managers, and AI consultants. From these interviews, GenAI applications are identified and classified by input type (general vs. custom) and degree of human augmentation. By categorizing applications based on their support for B2B marketing processes, the study enables an assessment of which activities have been augmented or disrupted by GenAI. Findings also clarify the skills industrial marketers need to adopt, integrate, and strategically leverage GenAI

effectively. Managerial implications, in turn, guide AI and marketing leaders driving GenAI transformation in industrial marketing.

2 Literature Review

2.1 B2B Marketing processes

Marketing processes encompass the structured routines through which organizations coordinate and deploy resources to achieve desired performance outcomes (Day, 1994; Herhausen et al., 2020). In B2B marketing, three core processes underpin these activities: marketing information management, marketing planning, and marketing implementation (Mikalef et al., 2023), often complemented by the marketing mix (4Ps) (Moorman & Day, 2016; Morgan et al., 2009; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005). Marketing information management encompasses the acquisition, analysis, and dissemination of market and stakeholder knowledge (Mikalef et al., 2023; Moorman & Day, 2016). Marketing planning involves developing strategies based on market intelligence and organizational resources (Varadarajan, 2010). Marketing implementation captures the execution, coordination, and evaluation of these strategies (Mikalef et al., 2023; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005).

2.2 The impact of GenAI on marketing processes and skills

Before the emergence of GenAI, machine learning had already been applied to marketing research, strategy, and decision-making tasks requiring complex analytical logic (Huang & Rust, 2021). With GenAI's ability to generate novel content through human-like reasoning from vast volumes of unstructured data and its accessible, user-friendly tools, marketing is primed for transformation (Grewal et al., 2025). Literature highlights many GenAI applications across marketing activities. These include generating customer and market insights (marketing information management), drafting and evaluating strategies and positioning statements (marketing planning), and producing personalized content, as well as enhancing lead generation, customer service, and advertising (marketing implementation) (Chan & Choi, 2025; Grewal et al., 2025; Kshetri et al., 2024).

Grewal et al. (2025) categorize GenAI applications along two dimensions: input type (general vs. custom) and the degree of human augmentation. They elaborate that general-input applications rely on broadly accessible data, whereas custom-input applications, such as retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), draw on task-specific data, increasing reliability and task specificity at the cost of greater development complexity. The degree of human augmentation indicates the extent of required human oversight and editing, and thus the level of automation (Grewal et al., 2025). While general-purpose chatbots achieve higher adoption due to their ease of use and flexibility, they lack deep integration into workflows, whereas custom applications enable stronger process integration but exhibit lower adoption rates due to higher complexity (Challapally et al., 2025).

Hermann & Puntoni (2025) argue that human replacement is more likely in marketing information management and implementation tasks, whereas marketing planning, often grounded in tacit knowledge, heuristics, and subjective judgment, remains more amenable to augmentation than substitution. Human augmentation is also often still required to guide AI in customer-facing applications to maintain trust and authenticity (Grigsby et al., 2025). The automation and enhancement potential of GenAI may challenge marketing in cost-focused firms that view it as a cost center, increasing pressure to demonstrate its strategic value (Cillo & Rubera, 2025). At the same time, GenAI reshapes skill requirements (Dwivedi et al., 2023). It frees marketers to focus on higher-value activities while augmenting their reasoning and access to unstructured data (Cillo & Rubera, 2025). Consequently, marketers must develop the skills to use GenAI tools effectively and to critically assess their potential and limitations (Grewal et al., 2025).

In summary, B2B marketing encompasses three core processes: information management, planning, and implementation (Mikalef et al., 2023), which have the potential to be disrupted by GenAI. GenAI applications differ along two principal dimensions: whether they depend on general or customized input, and the extent of human augmentation necessary, which determines their level of task specificity and their potential for automation (Grewal et al., 2025). As GenAI transforms these processes, marketing professionals must cultivate complementary skills to adopt it effectively and manage its impact on their evolving roles (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

3 Methodology

This study employs semi-structured interviews to address the research questions. Given the early stage of GenAI research, an exploratory qualitative approach is appropriate (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). The sample comprised three respondent groups, identified and contacted via LinkedIn and professional networks. The first group included managers and directors of AI, IT, and digital roles at large multinational industrial firms. These informants provided insights into deployed GenAI models and tools, development processes, training initiatives, and adoption strategies. The second group consisted of AI consultants, managers, and executives from technology consulting and cloud platform providers. Owing to their cross-industry client work, they offered a holistic perspective on the use of GenAI in industry. The third group included marketing leaders, managers, and marketing technology specialists from multinational industrial firms, who contributed domain-specific insights into the use of GenAI in marketing. In addition to providing an overview of the current situation regarding GenAI, respondents were asked what types of development they expected in the future.

To expand the participant pool, snowball sampling was used by requesting referrals from interviewees and selecting those meeting the sampling criteria (Noy, 2008). In total, 43 interviews were conducted with representatives from 18 industrial firms and 10 AI and cloud platform vendors. Interviews lasted 32 to 112 minutes (average 61 minutes), and were held remotely via MS Teams, which was also used for transcription. Overall, 1,498 A4 pages of transcripts were analyzed. Table 1 summarizes the respondent groups.

Table 1: Sampling and data collection for the research

	Group 1 AI managers 2/2024 – 9/2025	Group 2 AI consultants 2/2024 – 2/2025	Group 3 Marketing managers 1/2025 – 11/2025
Job roles	AI-, IT- and digital manager or director	AI consultant, AI manager, C-level	Head of marketing, marketing manager, MarTech manager
Company industry	Industrial (manufacturing, process, machinery)	Technology consultation, cloud platforms	Industrial (manufacturing, process, machinery)
Sample	23 interviews 14 companies	10 interviews 10 companies	10 interviews 9 companies

ATLAS.ti was used to review, code, and analyze transcripts. The interview data were analyzed using an abductive qualitative approach characterized by systematic combining (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The analysis proceeded iteratively between interview data and relevant theory. First, open, inductive coding was conducted to identify respondent-centric concepts grounded in participants' descriptions of current GenAI use and future development directions. Through constant comparison across interviews, these codes were refined and grouped into broader themes that describe marketing activities, application types, and the skills required of marketers. In the subsequent stage, abductive reasoning was employed by iteratively comparing the emerging themes with B2B marketing processes to identify connections between the two. This method grounded the findings in empirical insight, while enabling the contribution to ongoing theoretical discussions.

4 Findings

The findings are structured around the B2B marketing processes framework (Mikalef et al., 2023). The interviews identified specific activities in which B2B marketers leverage GenAI, grouped into marketing information management, planning, and implementation. For each activity, the GenAI application type is specified based on the framework of Grewal et al. (2025), and its impact on marketing processes and skills is evaluated. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

Table 2: The impact of GenAI on B2B marketing processes and skills

Marketing process	Impact of GenAI	Requirements for marketer skills
Information management	Currently: Sporadic use of GenAI and absent workflows. - Processes largely absent, as information management is seldom viewed as part of industrial marketing. - GenAI use is sporadic and limited to market intelligence with general-input, human-augmented tools. No plans to develop specialized applications. Future: Increased focus and established processes. The use of GenAI becomes more systematic. - As GenAI continues to automate and augment implementation activities, marketers' focus shifts to information management.	Skills required as focus shifts to information management: Market research: collecting, processing, analyzing, and disseminating insights from internal and external data. Relational skills: strengthening collaboration and connections with customers and sales.

Marketing process	Impact of GenAI	Requirements for marketer skills
	Automation and task specificity may increase but require more structured processes enabled by increased marketer focus on this domain.	
Marketing planning	Currently: Limited but emerging use, with some firms planning deeper integration. - GenAI use remains largely unsystematic, mainly supporting campaign planning with general-input, human-augmented tools with some exceptions. - Plans exist to introduce custom-input tools and better embed AI in planning processes. Future: Increased focus and workflow integration. - As GenAI increasingly automates and augments implementation, focus shifts on planning. - Task specificity may increase in the short term, and partial automation is a longer-term opportunity.	Skills required as focus shifts to marketing planning: Strategic thinking: proactively shaping marketing strategy. Data-driven decision-making: basing decisions on data and insights.
Marketing implementation	Currently: Widespread use, with active development toward greater automation and task specificity. - GenAI is widely used in content creation, lead management, and optimization. - All applications require human augmentation. Lead management and optimization employ custom input. Future: Reduced need for human augmentation but continued oversight. - Greater automation and task specificity, indicating rapid development in this domain. - Focus shifts to content management, as AI-generated content requires oversight and authentic content becomes more valuable. - Greater coordination and analysis of partners and activities is required as fewer tasks are performed manually in-house.	Skills required as GenAI augments and automates activities: Creativity: maintaining authentic content. Orchestration and coordination: managing marketing assets and partners. Marketing analytics: analyzing, interpreting, and acting on marketing performance data
GenAI-specific skills required from marketers: Prompting: formulating, scoping, and iteratively refining inputs to GenAI. AI literacy: understanding what AI can and cannot do and using AI responsibly. Experimental mindset: treating AI adoption as an iterative, learning-oriented process. Knowledge of IT processes: understanding how to progress AI initiatives.		

4.1 Information management

Activities related to marketing information management included market intelligence, comprising competitor, customer, and market analysis. Most used general-input, highly human-augmented AI chatbots (e.g., MS Copilot, ChatGPT) for this purpose, at least sporadically. Their effectiveness often depended on

individual prompting skills, and some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with output quality, attributing this to limited prompting expertise. Also, one respondent reported experimenting with CRM-integrated AI features for customer analysis. A potential GenAI application for market intelligence was discussed in one interview:

For example, artificial intelligence can monitor the web to see which construction projects are starting in different parts of the world and who is involved, which helps us identify companies that could be similar to our current customers. So, that's really interesting, and then we can target them.
(Marketing manager)

GenAI applications in information management were limited and unsystematic, and this area presents significant opportunities, especially for automation (Hermann & Puntoni, 2025). Although most companies had a dedicated market intelligence function, this domain was considered important, but the absence of processes and skills limited its development. Marketers were unaccustomed to conducting market research, and, beyond prompting skills, domain expertise gained through closer interactions with customers and frontline personnel would further enhance their information management capacity and use of GenAI. Unified processes were identified as crucial in adopting AI in this domain:

To do that, you need to get the processes in order, and we don't really have unified processes. We have substantial groundwork to do before we can get to more useful things, such as thinking about automation. For that, you need a unified process, and as long as everyone handles the process however they like, it cannot be automated. (Head of digital marketing)

Looking ahead, respondents anticipate that as GenAI increasingly automates implementation activities, marketers will reallocate capacity toward more systematic information management. Along this trajectory, the growth of automation and task specificity within this domain is expected to be contingent upon the development of more structured processes and a deeper expertise in the domain.

4.2 Marketing planning

The use of GenAI in marketing planning was limited to marketing campaign planning. Only two respondents reported systematic use, each employing a distinct approach. One described integrating digital marketing data from various channels

into the Azure cloud platform and combining it with internal datasets. A chatbot interface enabled marketers to prompt a custom-input model to analyze marketing performance and generate audience-specific recommendations. The tool provided insights into digital asset performance and suggested improvements to existing materials. This firm also outlined its forthcoming AI marketing planner:

This means that for each division, they specify its primary target audiences and channels. We then connect the AI to our raw data so it can learn from the entire dataset; the goal is to enable it to make strategic recommendations to the target audience, content, budgets, and other levels. (MarTech manager)

In contrast, another approach relied on prompting general-purpose GenAI chatbots for benchmarks and recommendations by querying information on content formats, advertising examples, and campaign structures to support planning, or by providing campaign attributes (such as target audiences, topics, and objectives) and requesting structured campaign suggestions. Marketing planning was generally viewed as less suitable for automation, as strategic decisions require human judgment. Customizing inputs with proprietary data, on the other hand, could enable firm-specific recommendations. GenAI supports the shift from intuition to data-driven decision-making, though AI literacy and systematic processes are essential. Moreover, strategic thinking was highlighted to integrate the insights into marketing strategies. Respondents hoped to offload implementation tasks to GenAI, freeing capacity for planning, but also sought AI support for strategic tasks:

I'd rather see AI used for decision-making, marketing planning, and improving customer understanding — rather than just content production — because understanding the bigger picture is more challenging and creates more value. (...) The value humans add is to strategically focus our efforts (VP, Marketing)

Although current utilization remains predominantly unsystematic, respondents anticipated a gradual transition towards enhanced workflow integration, whereby custom-input applications would facilitate more firm-specific strategic recommendations. Partial automation of planning activities was regarded as a long-term prospect, contingent upon the concurrent development of AI literacy and structured procedures.

4.3 Marketing implementation

Marketing implementation included several GenAI-enhanced activities, such as content creation and curation, lead management, and asset optimization. Most firms encouraged the use of company-specific tools to mitigate confidentiality risks, and marketers mainly relied on general-input, human-augmented tools, while some firms used translation bots trained on brand tone. Plans existed to develop customized bots using proprietary data to generate and repurpose content, potentially linked to performance data for channel-specific optimization. GenAI-generated visuals were restricted in some organizations but used internally in others. One developed the capacity to deploy them in external channels. Respondents emphasized the need for strong human oversight and customized inputs for AI-generated content and sought a more structured way of using GenAI without sacrificing brand integrity:

My hope this year is to find a more structured way to use [GenAI], because when you use the social media channels' own AI tools and other tools, the company's own voice sometimes gets lost. (...) The idea is to emphasize that you should use it to speed up the process, while maintaining authenticity, keeping the main messages in mind, and so on. (Head of marketing)

Lead management was identified as a promising application area. Respondents noted that digital inquiries are diverse and context-specific, often requiring additional clarification before conversion. Website-based service bots and automated follow-up emails were largely in the planning phase, while lead scoring was already in use at two companies. These use cases typically rely on custom input and aim to reduce human interaction. However, their effectiveness remains constrained by marketers' limited trust in AI recommendations:

We still don't trust artificial intelligence-based scoring more than a rule-based version done by a human. (...) People don't trust values that indicate a good lead if they don't understand the scoring criteria. (MarTech manager)

Optimization activities covered copy, visuals, ad formats, and search and generative engine optimization (SEO and GEO). Marketers mainly used AI features embedded in advertising channels or specialized marketing platforms. These tools offered task-specific optimization with minimal human effort but less flexibility than general-purpose models. Marketing analytics was also identified as a promising area,

requiring basic analytical literacy to leverage GenAI effectively. Other skills respondents emphasize include content management and creativity to maintain authenticity; orchestration skills to manage how AI is used to create marketing assets and to manage campaign flows; and an experimental mindset and understanding of IT processes to effectively adopt and develop GenAI tools and applications. Overall, marketing implementation is experiencing the most substantial transformation, though integration into critical workflows remains limited:

However, the process is not yet at its peak or precise enough to significantly increase agility. [GenAI] is used in some places. And then there is that human labor in between, and then at some point, we return to using AI. However, an agile operating model as a whole could be explored further.
(Marketing manager)

Respondents anticipated that this trajectory would persist, with the demand for human augmentation decreasing as tools become more advanced and more thoroughly integrated into workflows. Nonetheless, oversight of AI-generated content was projected to remain crucial as manual tasks are increasingly automated, placing greater emphasis on content management, campaign orchestration, and performance analytics.

5 Conclusion

This study advances the literature in four key ways. First, it identifies GenAI applications in industrial marketing, an underexplored area, and categorizes them under B2B marketing processes (Mikalef et al., 2023). Applications in information management and planning were limited to market intelligence and campaign planning, whereas implementation-related uses, content creation, lead management, and optimization, were more prevalent, with content creation most common. Second, it evaluates these applications in terms of required human augmentation and reliance on general versus custom input (Grewal et al., 2025), indicating their level of task specificity and automation. Information management and planning primarily rely on general input and high human augmentation, suggesting unrealized opportunities for automation and customization (Hermann & Puntoni, 2025). In contrast, implementation activities employ more custom-input solutions and show higher automation.

Third, the findings show that GenAI's impact is concentrated in marketing implementation, while its influence on information management and planning remains limited. Development efforts focus primarily on implementation, indicating continued disruption through increased automation and task-specificity. This allows marketers to shift focus toward interpreting large-scale data using tacit and proprietary organizational knowledge inaccessible to GenAI (Hermann & Puntoni, 2025) and to use these insights to proactively shape strategic direction, thereby strengthening marketing's value contribution (Cillo & Rubera, 2025).

Fourth, the study specifies the required skills to leverage GenAI and embrace the new strategic role. As implementation becomes increasingly automated, content management and creativity remain critical to maintaining quality (Grigsby et al., 2025) while campaign orchestration and analytics support workflow improvement. A shift in focus to information management and planning emphasizes the capacity to gather and harness market and proprietary data, which is particularly valuable for industrial firms that rely on detailed customer information (Mikalef et al., 2023), coupled with data-driven decision-making and strategic thinking. Effective GenAI adoption further requires AI literacy, an experimental mindset, technological fluency, prompting skills, and understanding of IT processes.

The findings suggest that AI managers should facilitate the development of high-value GenAI applications in marketing, as transformative use cases remain underdeveloped and marketers often lack the skills to initiate them. Given marketing's role at the sales-customer interface, such applications can directly influence growth and customer orientation. Marketing leaders should systematically integrate GenAI into processes to enhance consistency and to free resources for strategic work. This requires collaboration with IT on targets, training, and governance. Currently, adoption is largely driven by individual initiative, highlighting the need for more proactive leadership.

As an exploratory qualitative study, this research does not quantify impact or comprehensively map GenAI applications but provides a foundation for future research. Given the rapid evolution of GenAI and its limited workflow integration, continued relevance for this research stream requires ongoing dialogue between academia and practice. Finally, the predominantly Finnish-based sample limits this study's generalizability and calls for broader international research.

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