Fashion Marketing and AI: The Need for Developing AI Ethics for Sustainable Fashion Consumer Relationships through Transparent Practices

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ABSTRACT

The meteoric rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionised diverse sectors, including the field of fashion marketing. The fashion industry has been transformed by AI's capacity to analyse large quantities of data, forecast consumer behaviour, and tailor marketing strategies to individual customers. The incorporation of AI into fashion marketing has provided firms with unparalleled chances to enhance customer experiences. AI algorithms have the ability to customise product recommendations, forecast fashion trends, enhance pricing tactics, facilitate cross-selling, and personalise marketing messages for particular consumers.

The paper examines the emergence of substantial ethical challenges in parallel with these developments, namely pertaining to data privacy, algorithmic biases, and the manipulation of consumer behaviour. The enormous data gathering necessary for AI-powered personalisation creates significant issues regarding consumer privacy. The current situation highlights the crucial requirement for ethical principles in the utilisation of AI, namely with the protection of data privacy and the disclosure of information to consumers. These cases demonstrate how invasive marketing methods can unintentionally reveal sensitive personal information, leading to a loss of consumer confidence and underscoring the importance of ethical AI practices in fashion marketing.

Additionally, a significant number of consumers lack awareness regarding the comprehensive nature of data collection, analysis, and end use. The absence of transparency can result in a feeling of distrust and exploitation among consumers, as well as harm the brand's reputation, cause product failures, and lead to legal and regulatory problems. These concerns are particularly noticeable because legal frameworks are frequently underdeveloped, and consumers may possess different levels of digital literacy and understanding regarding data protection. This discrepancy can intensify the hazards linked to AI, facilitating the concealment and unopposed continuation of unethical practices. This paper advocates for the immediate necessity of cultivating ethical AI strategies in fashion marketing that prioritise transparency and cultivate enduring sustainable consumer relationships. This paper will attempt to

explore the fundamental principles of AI ethics and transparency that businesses should prioritise in their AI-driven marketing practices. As brands increasingly rely on AI for marketing activations, it is crucial for them to centre their practices on these important pillars and create ethical frameworks for use of AI. The paper also stresses that a collaborative approach between corporations, governments, academic institutions, and consumer advocacy groups can guarantee that AI-powered fashion marketing not only boosts economic expansion but also maintains ethical principles, promoting a just and equitable marketing landscape.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Ethical Concerns, Marketing, Data Privacy, Consumer Relationships, Transparent Marketing Practices

INTRODUCTION

AI has numerous applications in marketing, revolutionizing how consumers and brands interact with each other. As these technologies have gotten more advanced, they are potentially changing how consumers interact with each touchpoint. A Deloitte Study 2020 noted that the top applications of AI for organisations was enhancing existing products and services, creating new products and services, and enhancing relationships. AI can particularly aid brands with marketing applications in chatbots, email marketing automation, dynamic web design, social media sentiment analysis among other marketing solutions with customers. Commonly utilized tools in social media and search engine advertising, email marketing platforms, e-commerce solutions, and content creation applications increasingly incorporate functionalities powered by what is currently referred to as "AI" in business contexts. In contemporary business practices, particularly in marketing, AI typically denotes software designed to perform specific tasks, such as optimizing advertisement placement for greater efficiency or tailoring email content to enhance response rates.

Applications of AI in Fashion Marketing

A 2023 report by Gartner estimated that by 2025, approximately 30 % of the outbound marketing messages being sent from large organisations will be generated synthetically. AI possesses the capability to enhance, expedite, and generate novel content, fundamentally reshaping the functioning and dynamics of marketing practices. Key applications of AI in Fashion Marketing with respect to the 4 P'S of Marketing include but are not limited to

1. Product
    a) Product or Service Recommendations: Leveraging AI to offer highly personalized product or service suggestions based on customer preferences and behavior.
    b) Online Product Merchandising: Optimizing product placement and categorization on digital platforms to enhance visibility and drive sales.

c) Website Operation and Optimization: Ensuring seamless website functionality through AI-powered testing and performance enhancements.
d) Web Analytics Narrative Generation: Utilizing AI to create insightful summaries of website performance metrics for better decision-making.

2. Price
   a) Dynamic Pricing: Using AI to analyze market trends, competitor pricing, and demand to set optimal prices for products or services.
   b) Marketing Mix Analysis: Evaluating the balance of product, price, promotion, and place to maximize ROI using AI insights.

3. Promotion
   a) Marketing Campaign Automation: Automating email campaigns, landing page creation, and customer segmentation to improve outreach and efficiency.
   b) Social-Media Planning, Buying, and Execution: Strategically managing social media campaigns with AI-driven insights and execution tools.
   c) Programmatic Digital Ad Buying: Automating the purchase and placement of ads using real-time bidding systems to optimize reach and budget.
   d) Television Ad Placement: Partially automating ad placement on TV by analyzing audience data and scheduling for maximum impact.
   e) Social-Media Sentiment Analysis: Monitoring and interpreting customer sentiment on social platforms to adjust strategies in real time.

4. Place (Distribution and Customer Interaction)
   a) Chatbots for Lead Development and Support: AI-driven chatbots to nurture leads, provide customer support, and facilitate cross-selling or upselling opportunities.
   b) Inbound Call Analysis and Routing: Using AI to analyze calls and route them to the appropriate department or agent.
   c) Customer Comment and Email Analysis: Classifying and responding to customer feedback efficiently using AI-powered tools.
   d) Sales Lead Scoring: Prioritizing sales opportunities based on predictive analytics to allocate resources effectively.

Ethical Challenges

The integration of AI in marketing introduces significant ethical concerns, particularly around the potential for more advanced forms of consumer manipulation. AI algorithms, fueled by access to extensive consumer data, are capable of crafting highly tailored marketing messages designed to appeal to individuals' specific vulnerabilities, preferences, and desires. While such personalization can enhance customer engagement, it also carries the risk of influencing consumers to make decisions that may not align with their long-term interests or well-being.

In extreme cases, these practices could encourage behaviors or purchases that are detrimental to consumers' health, financial stability, or overall quality of life. This highlights the critical need for ethical frameworks to ensure that AI-driven marketing prioritizes transparency, fairness, and consumer protection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into fashion and retail marketing has led to an increasing volume of literature analysing the technological, ethical, and societal ramifications of AI-driven marketing techniques. Although AI provides substantial benefits in personalisation, predictive analytics, and consumer engagement, it simultaneously presents important ethical issues that require attention. This literature review seeks to examine the principal themes arising from the scholarly and business discussions on AI ethics in fashion and retail marketing, concentrating on matters such as data privacy, algorithmic biases, and consumer manipulation.

AI in Digital Marketing

AI-driven marketing practices have significantly transformed consumer engagement and brand growth (Tadimarri et al., 2024). However, the impact of AI on marketing also requires a shift towards meeting consumer needs and maintaining trust (Marinchak et al., 2018). Consumers' perceptions of AI advertising are influenced by their perceived objectivity of the advertisement creation process, which can impact trust and brand loyalty (Wu & Wen, 2021). Additionally, factors such as accessibility, brand image, and customer care services play a significant role in creating brand loyalty through digital practices (Sharma, 2019).

Ethical Challenges

The ethical issues associated with AI-driven digital marketing are multifaceted and complex. Kumar and Suthar (2024) and Sharma et al. (2023) highlight the need for transparency, accountability, and data privacy protection in AI-based marketing practices. They emphasize the importance of responsible AI development and ongoing monitoring to ensure ethical standards. Huriye (2023) underscores the need for a human-centered approach and collaboration between stakeholders to develop and implement ethical guidelines for AI systems. Du and Xie (2021) identify AI biases, ethical design, consumer privacy, cybersecurity, individual autonomy, and unemployment as key ethical issues in AI-enabled products, including those in digital marketing. These studies collectively underscore the importance of addressing these ethical concerns to ensure the responsible and ethical use of AI in digital marketing.

Ethical Frameworks

A range of studies have identified key ethical concerns in the use of AI in digital marketing, including perpetuating biases, violating privacy, and manipulating consumer behavior (Naz & Kashif, 2024). These concerns are particularly relevant in

emerging markets, where data protection and consumer trust are often less regulated. To address these issues, practical guidelines have been proposed, including transparency, data protection, and responsible AI development (Sharma et al., 2023). However, implementing these guidelines may be challenging due to the complex legal and ethical landscape in emerging markets (Kumar & Suthar, 2024). Therefore, a comprehensive framework is needed to ensure the responsible use of AI in digital marketing in these contexts.

Regulatory Mechanisms

The effectiveness of existing regulatory mechanisms in AI-driven marketing is assessed in several studies. Sharma et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of transparency, data privacy, and consent in AI-based marketing, while Kumar (2024) identifies ethical and legal challenges such as discrimination, bias, and data privacy, suggesting solutions like responsible innovation and bias detection tools. Oladele et al. (2024) focus on governance frameworks to address ethical challenges, including algorithmic biases and data storage procedures, highlighting the need for public awareness and stringent regulations. Nemec (2024) discusses potential solutions involving self-regulation and government regulation to mitigate ethical concerns in AI, such as discrimination and false information. These studies collectively underscore the need for transparency, responsible innovation, and effective governance in AI-driven marketing to address ethical concerns.

Balancing Efficiency and Ethics

Studies have explored the intersection of marketing efficiency and ethical considerations in fostering sustainable and consumer-friendly practices. Khalid (2023) and Bhargava (2023) emphasize the importance of sustainable marketing strategies, with Khalid focusing on eco-friendly lifestyle promotion and Bhargava on sustainable and eco-friendly products. Both studies highlight the role of consumer education, storytelling, transparency, and eco-friendly packaging in these strategies. García-Rosell (2007) adds an ethical dimension, discussing the roles and responsibilities of market actors in sustainable marketing. Trivedi et al. (2018) underscore the need for businesses to align their sustainability practices with consumer expectations, proposing a framework for integrating sustainable marketing strategies. These studies collectively underscore the potential for businesses to balance marketing efficiency with ethical considerations by adopting sustainable and
consumer-friendly practices.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach using case studies to explore the ethical challenges and opportunities associated with the use of AI in marketing strategies. Case study methodology is applied in this paper as it allows for an in-depth examination of real-world practices within organizations that heavily rely on AI-driven

marketing. The focus is on specific cases as the paper aims to identify patterns, themes, and actionable insights that can guide the development of ethical frameworks for AI implementation.

The organizations included in this study were purposefully selected from industries known for extensive AI adoption, such as e-commerce, fashion, and consumer goods. These sectors were chosen because they frequently deploy advanced AI technologies to enhance customer engagement, optimize marketing campaigns, and drive sales growth. Companies with documented instances of borderline unethical AI practices, such as concerns over data privacy violations, algorithmic biases, or manipulative marketing tactics, were prioritized for inclusion. This selection ensured that the study could identify both problematic practices and emerging solutions, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the ethical landscape.

Data was largely collected from secondary sources, including media articles, industry reports and academic papers discussing AI marketing practices by organisations. Additionally publically available marketing campaign data from organisations was also used to ensure coverage of all possible ethical concerns that usage of AI might entail.

Data Analysis: Unethical Use of AI in Marketing

The analysis examines publicly accessible instances in which brands have encountered criticism for unethical marketing techniques influenced by AI. Each instance underscores the potential of AI systems to breach customer trust, privacy, and ethical standards, offering critical insights into the necessity for responsible AI implementation.

Target's Predictive Analytics and Adolescent Pregnancy

Target, a prominent retailer in the United States, employed predictive analytics to ascertain customers who were likely to be pregnant based on their purchasing behaviours. Target's algorithm identified a teenage girl as pregnant by analysing data on products including vitamins, lotion, and maternity clothing, prior to her family's awareness. The AI-driven marketing effort subsequently dispatched targeted pregnancy-related adverts to her residence, unwittingly disclosing her condition to her family. This instance elicited considerable ethical apprehensions pertaining to privacy infringements and the utilisation of predictive data, particularly in relation to vulnerable consumers. Target encountered public backlash for infringing on privacy limits, highlighting the necessity for increased prudence in managing sensitive consumer information.

Zara's Insensitive Marketing Campaign

In 2023, Zara, the fashion behemoth, encountered criticism for an AI-driven marketing initiative promoting "The Jacket." The advertisement showcased a model clad in black attire, grasping a white cloth-covered object within a stark, minimalistic environment,

which some viewers perceived as reminiscent of photos from war-affected areas, including Gaza. The AI algorithm that generated this advertisement neglected to account for the cultural and political sensitivities associated with such imagery. Zara faced allegations of insensitivity and trivialising genuine pain for the purpose of fashion promotion. This scenario emphasises the significance of cultural understanding in the application of AI inside creative processes, as insufficient human oversight may result in substantial errors.

Krogers employs cameras and electronic shelf labels

Krogers uses AI-driven cameras to assess customer demographics, including age and gender, as an element of their marketing campaigns. It employed cameras deployed in retail establishments to utilise facial recognition and other artificial intelligence technology to anticipate client attributes and provide tailored adverts appropriately. Kroger has also transformed price tags by replacing paper tags with digital alternatives, enabling employees to update item pricing in seconds. Furthermore, it intends to install cameras on its EDGE Shelf displays and employ facial recognition technology enabled with AI to ascertain details about its customers, such as gender and age, in order to deliver personalised offers and promotions, according to the letter.

The utilisation of such technology engenders significant privacy problems, particularly when consumers are oblivious to the collection and analysis of their data. Critics contend that these AI systems may result in prejudice and exclusion, especially if specific groups are unjustly targeted or overlooked. Retailers employing these technologies encounter increasing demand to reveal their data gathering practices and secure customer consent.

Microsoft's AI-Generated Content Marketing

Microsoft has encountered public criticism owing to an inadequately handled content marketing campaign featuring an AI-generated guide to the premier tourist attractions in Ottawa. The article on Microsoft's blog designated the Ottawa Food Bank as the third-best attraction in the city, with the suggestion to "Consider going into it on an empty stomach." This AI-generated video was criticised for inappropriately recommending a food bank within the context of tourist locations.

The public backlash arose from the unsuitable tone and setting, with many perceiving the proposal as both awkward and insulting. Upon the recognition that the content was produced by AI, the circumstance incited additional discourse around the constraints of AI in generating culturally and contextually suitable material. In reaction to the criticism, Microsoft promptly published an apology and retracted the article.

Mood Media's Emotion-Tracking Billboards

Mood Media deployed AI-driven billboards that analyse clients' facial expressions to assess emotional reactions, like happiness, fear, or surprise. The technology utilised

this emotional data to customise real-time adverts according to the emotions of bystanders.

Critics promptly expressed apprehensions that these emotion-tracking billboards gathered and scrutinised sensitive emotional data without specific consent. This approach was regarded as a significant breach of privacy, particularly as individuals were oblivious to the monitoring of their emotions and the subsequent use of this data to manipulate the adverts they encountered. The AI might identify emotional states and tailor customised advertisements, prompting ethical concerns over manipulation and equity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results reveal that the implementation of AI in fashion and retail marketing has generated considerable ethical issues, especially with data privacy, algorithmic bias, and customer behaviour manipulation. The examined scenarios underscore the necessity of establishing an ethical AI framework that emphasises openness, data protection, and consumer autonomy in AI-driven marketing approaches.

Table 1. Ethical Framework Priorities for Consumer Marketing Applications of AI

AI Application	Ethical Issue	Ethical Framework Priority
Predictive Analytics for Pregnancy Detection	Invasion of privacy, unintended disclosure of personal data	**Consumer Consent and Transparency**: Ensure that consumers are thoroughly apprised of the methods by which their data will be gathered, utilised, and analysed. Organisations must secure express consent for data utilisation and furnish transparent disclosures concerning its application. (Kumar & Suthar, 2024; Du & Xie, 2021). **Data Minimization**: Collect data that is essential for the specific objective, ensuring that sensitive information is not utilised for unrelated or intrusive objectives. (Huriye, 2023; Sharma et al., 2023). **Privacy Protection**: Establish stringent privacy protocols to protect consumer data, particularly in the application of sensitive predictive analytics. (Sharma, 2019; Du & Xie, 2021). **Ethical Data Usage**: Refrain from utilising personal information to influence consumer behaviour,

		especially concerning susceptible groups. (Khalid, 2023; Bhargava, 2023). **Consumer Control**: Allow consumers the ability to opt out or modify their data-sharing settings, granting them control over the use of their data. (Wu & Wen, 2021).
AI-driven Creative Marketing	Cultural insensitivity, inappropriate context in AI-generated content	**AI Content Creation and Cultural Awareness:** Ensure that AI-driven creative processes take into account cultural and societal contexts to prevent inadvertent offence or injury (Marinchak et al., 2018; Naz & Kashif, 2024). **Human Oversight in AI Content Generation:** Establish human-in-the-loop protocols to evaluate and authorise AI-generated content, particularly for sensitive subjects or visuals (García-Rosell, 2007). **Clarity and Responsibility:** Brands must disclose the influence of AI in creative processes and assume accountability for any unforeseen repercussions (Kumar & Suthar, 2024; Sharma et al., 2023). **AI Model Sensitivity Training:** Train AI systems using diverse and inclusive datasets to prevent the reinforcement of detrimental stereotypes or the generation of culturally insensitive information (Sharma, 2019; Trivedi et al., 2018). **Consumer Engagement and Feedback:** Actively interact with consumers to comprehend their viewpoints on marketing efforts and promptly answer concerns (Khalid, 2023).
AI-powered cameras for demographic analysis	Data privacy concerns, potential discrimination in ad targeting	**Informed Consent:** Ensure that customers are aware of data collecting methods and given explicit explanations regarding the use of their personal data (e.g., demographic

		information) (Oladele et al., 2024; Nemec, 2024). **Data Privacy and Security:** Enforce rigorous data privacy measures to safeguard consumer data against unauthorised access or breaches (Sharma et al., 2023; Kumar, 2024). **Equitable Practices:** Utilise AI systems that have been evaluated for fairness and inclusion, guaranteeing that they do not reinforce or exacerbate biases (Huriye, 2023; Sharma, 2019). **Consumer Autonomy Regarding Data**: Offer explicit alternatives for consumers to oversee or decline data collecting procedures, guaranteeing their authority over personal information (Sharma et al., 2023; Trivedi et al., 2018). **Ethical Marketing Transparency:** Ensure transparency with consumers regarding the utilisation of AI in personalised advertising and marketing tactics to cultivate trust and accountability (Wu & Wen, 2021).
AI-generated Content Marketing	Lack of contextual awareness, inappropriate tone in AI-generated content	**Cultural Sensitivity:** Incorporate AI systems that consider cultural and contextual significance in the generation of marketing content, particularly in sensitive contexts (Khalid, 2023; Sharma et al., 2023). Human Evaluation of **AI-Generated Content:** Mandate that all AI-generated marketing materials receive human evaluation to avert errors and guarantee that the messaging is suitable and consistent with company values (García-Rosell, 2007). **Clarity with Consumers:** Notify customers when material is produced by AI and elucidate the application of AI in marketing strategies (Huriye, 2023; Marinchak et al., 2018). **Responsibility for AI Failures:** Brands must assume accountability for the

		results of their AI-driven marketing initiatives and promptly respond to any public dissent or ethical issues (Oladele et al., 2024). Consumer Trust and input: Interact with customers to get input on AI-generated material and modify processes as necessary to uphold trust and ensure compliance with ethical standards (Kumar & Suthar, 2024).
Emotion-tracking AI billboards	Privacy invasion, emotional manipulation	**Informed Consent for Emotional Data**: Explicitly notify customers when their emotional data is being gathered and provide them the option to opt-in or opt-out of these practices (Sharma et al., 2023; Kumar, 2024). **Privacy Protection:** Establish stringent protocols to safeguard the emotional and biometric data obtained from consumers, guaranteeing secure storage and ethical use (Sharma, 2019; Du & Xie, 2021). **Clarity in Emotional AI Methodologies**: Clearly communicate the objectives of emotional data collecting and its application in shaping marketing strategies (Sharma et al., 2023; Wu & Wen, 2021). **Ethical Utilisation of Emotional Data:** Ensure that emotional data is not utilised to manipulate or abuse consumers' vulnerabilities, and provide controls to prevent discriminatory practices (Oladele et al., 2024; Nemec, 2024). **Regulatory Compliance and Accountability:** Ensure adherence to data protection legislation, and implement proactive strategies to prevent emotional AI systems from violating ethical or legal standards (Khalid, 2023; Bhargava, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The capacity of AI to analyse extensive datasets enables brands to forecast consumer behaviour, customise experiences, and optimise marketing strategies; yet, it also presents dangers about privacy infringements, algorithmic prejudice, and emotional manipulation. The examined incidents, including Target's predictive analytics and Zara's culturally inappropriate campaign, highlight the necessity for an ethical framework regulating the application of AI in marketing. These examples demonstrate that AI, when implemented without proper ethical considerations, can unintentionally injure consumers, tarnish brand reputation, and undermine public trust.

The proposed ethical framework corresponds with current academic discussions regarding the proper application of AI in marketing (Marinchak et al., 2018; Kumar, 2024). Furthermore, it underscores the imperative for human supervision in AI systems, guaranteeing that AI technology serves as an instrument to enhance, rather than supplant, human discernment in critical situations.

As AI technology advances, the ethical landscape will likewise transform. The future of AI in fashion and retail marketing will necessitate ongoing adaptation to new technology and changing consumer expectations. Future research may concentrate on establishing AI regulatory frameworks that harmonise innovation with consumer protection, especially in emerging nations where regulatory conditions may still be nascent (Kumar & Suthar, 2024). In-depth examination of the ethical ramifications of emotion-tracking technologies and predictive analytics in marketing will be essential, especially as consumer awareness and digital literacy advance. The increasing convergence of AI, ethics, and data privacy necessitates cooperative initiatives by firms, governments, and consumer advocacy organisations to guarantee that AI continues to serve as a beneficial influence in the marketing domain.

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