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# **Generative artificial intelligence in content marketing production**

Exploring acceptance and adoption in marketing agencies

School of Marketing  
Marketing Management  
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**ABSTRACT:**

Generative AI is fundamentally changing how content marketing is produced. Marketing agencies, which have traditionally provided clients with creative, strategic, and technical expertise, now face a situation where AI tools enable a much broader range of actors to produce professional-quality content.

This thesis examines how generative AI is used and accepted in content marketing production within Finnish marketing agencies. The theoretical framework is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), extended with individual, organisational, and environmental factors. The study is qualitative and interpretivist, drawing on eight semi-structured interviews conducted across four Finnish marketing agencies of varying sizes, analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings broadly confirm the relevance of TAM while revealing its limitations. Perceived usefulness is the most significant driver of adoption, and perceived ease of use varies by tool type. Language models integrate easily into daily workflows, while visual and video tools present more varied adoption patterns, shaped by interface complexity, output quality, and the reliability of what the tools produce. Professional identity emerged as a significant factor among creative practitioners, who describe a tension between acknowledging GenAI as useful and feeling that AI-assisted work is less fully their own.

At the organisational level, clear governance and structured knowledge sharing are associated with more consistent use, while data security and copyright considerations form practical boundaries on client work. At the environmental level, competitive pressure and client expectations shape which GenAI applications are prioritised. The key theoretical contribution of the study is the identification of professional identity as a significant factor in GenAI acceptance, extending TAM in the context of creative professional work.

The findings also reveal meaningful variation across agency sizes. Larger agencies have developed more structured governance and dedicated AI training programmes, while smaller agencies rely more heavily on individual initiative and self-directed learning, with support structures still forming. The study suggests that realising the full potential of GenAI in creative agency work requires deliberate attention to how freed-up capacity is directed, how ethical boundaries around client data and intellectual property are maintained, and how professional confidence is supported during a period of significant occupational change.

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**KEYWORDS:** generative artificial intelligence, content marketing, marketing agencies, technology acceptance, technology adoption, creative work, professional identity

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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Generatiivinen tekoäly muuttaa sisältömarkkinoinnin tuotantoa perusteellisesti. Markkinointitoimistot, jotka ovat perinteisesti tarjonneet asiakkailleen luovaa, strategista ja teknistä asiantuntemusta, kohtaavat nyt tilanteen, jossa tekoälytyökalut mahdollistavat yhä laajemman joukon toimijoita tuottamaan ammattimaista sisältöä.

Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on selvittää, miten generatiivista tekoälyä hyväksytään ja käytetään sisältömarkkinoinnin tuotannossa suomalaisissa markkinointitoimistoissa. Tutkimuksen teoreettisena viitekehysenä toimii Teknologian hyväksymismalli (TAM), jota laajennetaan yksilö-, organisaatio- ja ympäristötason tekijöillä. Tutkimus on laadullinen ja tulkinnallinen, ja aineisto koostuu kahdeksasta puolistrukturoidusta haastattelusta neljässä erikokoisessa suomalaisessa markkinointitoimistossa. Aineisto analysoitiin temaattisella analyysillä.

Tulokset vahvistavat TAM-mallin relevanssin, mutta osoittavat myös sen rajoitukset. Koettu hyödyllisyys on merkittävin käyttöönottoa edistävä tekijä, ja koettu helppokäyttöisyys vaihtelee työkalutyypeittäin. Kielimallit integroituvat helposti käyttöön arjessa, kun taas visuaalisten ja video työkalujen omaksuminen on vaihtelevampaa ja muotoutuu käyttöliittymien monimutkaisuuden, tuotosten laadun sekä työkalujen tuottamien lopputulosten ennakoitavuuden perusteella. Ammatillinen identiteetti nousi aineistosta merkittävänä tekijänä erityisesti luovissa rooleissa, joissa ammatillaiset kuvaavat jännitettä tekoälyn hyödyllisyyden tunnustamisen ja tekoälyavusteisen työn omistajuuden tunteen välillä.

Organisaatiotasolla selkeä hallinto ja rakenteellinen tiedonjako ovat yhteydessä yhdenmukaisempaan käyttöön, kun taas tietoturva ja tekijänoikeuskysymykset muodostavat käytännön reunaehdoja. Ympäristötasolla kilpailupaine ja asiakasodotukset määrittävät, mitä työkaluja priorisoidaan. Tutkimuksen keskeinen kontribuutio on ammatillisen identiteetin tunnistaminen merkittäväksi tekijäksi tekoälyn hyväksymisessä, mikä laajentaa TAM-mallia luovien ammattilaisten kontekstiin.

Tulokset paljastavat myös merkittäviä eroja erikokoisten toimistojen välillä. Suuremmilla toimistoilla on kehittyneemmät hallintokäytännöt ja rakenteelliset tekoälykoulutusohjelmat, kun taas pienemmät toimistot nojautuvat enemmän yksittäisten henkilöiden aloitteellisuuteen ja itseohjautuvaan oppimiseen tukirakenteiden ollessa vasta muotoutumassa. Tutkimus osoittaa, että generatiivisen tekoälyn täyden potentiaalin hyödyntäminen luovassa toimistotyössä edellyttää tietoista huomiota siihen, mihin vapautuva kapasiteetti ohjataan, miten asiakastietoihin ja tekijänoikeuksiin liittyvät eettiset rajat ylläpidetään, ja miten ammatillista itseluottamusta tuetaan merkittävään ammatillisen muutoksen aikana.

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**AVAINSANAT:** generative artificial intelligence, content marketing, marketing agencies, technology acceptance, technology adoption, creative work, professional identity

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## 1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the world of marketing, as certain tasks from marketers can now be assigned to machines, which can perform them more efficiently while freeing up time for marketers for other tasks (Jain & Aggarwal, 2020, p. 3966). AI refers to computer systems that can perform tasks that require intelligence and cognitive abilities previously viewed as exclusive to humans, including processes such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making (Jain & Aggarwal, 2020, p. 3965; Verma et al., 2021, p. 2; Wladawsky-Berger, 2017). It encompasses a range of technologies, including robotics, machine learning, natural language processing, deep learning, and generative AI (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 2; Dennehy et al., 2023, p. 1).

Generative AI (GenAI) refers to a form of artificial intelligence that creates new and original content by identifying and replicating patterns within existing data fields (Gao et al., 2023, p. 10). Through prompting, an interaction technique unique to GenAI, users can instruct AI applications using natural language and generate desired outputs, such as text or images (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 3). GenAI operates across multiple modalities, enabling the generation of text, images, video, code, sound, and even complex objects like molecules or 3D renderings (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 5).

In the marketing context, GenAI applications are increasingly used to create tailored content, generate realistic product imagery or videos, and assist in campaign planning (Kedi et al., 2024, p. 1983; Kshetri, 2024, p. 15; Parker et al., 2025, p. 2). Content marketing, which focuses on creating and distributing valuable content to attract and engage a defined target audience, to build customer relationships, loyalty, and profitability (Lou & Xie, 2021, p. 376), has been particularly influenced by the adoption of AI-powered technologies (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022, p. 50). Content marketing agencies, which provide content strategy, creative production, and technical execution, have traditionally played a central role in enabling firms to produce this content, especially as digital media environments have grown more complex and resource-intensive (Wahid et al., 2025, p.

4). Clients have historically relied on these agencies to access creative, technical, and strategic expertise that is not available in-house.

In this context, GenAI is changing both how content is created and how agencies work. Specifically, GenAI can enhance the creation and optimisation of marketing content, such as images and videos, copywriting, and content planning (Gao et al., 2023, p. 10). It can enhance creativity, streamline design workflows, personalise content for diverse audiences, and promote accessibility by allowing even non-designers to create professional-quality materials (Liu et al., 2024, p. 295). As GenAI tools have become more user-friendly and widely accessible, client organisations of all sizes have begun to experiment with integrating these capabilities into their own marketing workflows, expanding the range of tasks that can be carried out internally (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 4). The fast-growing range of GenAI tools is reshaping marketing practice by enabling teams, both within agencies and client organisations, to produce diverse content more efficiently than ever before (Kshetri, 2024, p. 15).

Effective GenAI implementation in marketing agencies requires not only investing in necessary technological tools, but also fostering an organisational culture that encourages innovation and continuous learning (Mohd Amin et al., 2025, p. 2). However, despite its promising potential and benefits, implementing GenAI in content production presents several challenges, including technology integration, high implementation costs, data security concerns, and internal resistance to change (Triolita & Al-Amin, 2025, p. 2). Given the varying levels of AI readiness and the complexity of AI solutions, companies may need to retrain staff and restructure their marketing processes (Mohd Amin et al., 2025, p. 2). Moreover, research shows that user acceptance of AI depends on factors such as perceived credibility, usefulness, convenience, and trust, while negative attitudes may arise from perceived threats, performance risks, or resistance to change (Jiang et al., 2024, p. 2). These challenges highlight the importance of understanding how marketing professionals and leaders perceive, adopt, and integrate AI, particularly GenAI, into creative work, forming the basis for this study.

## 1.1 Research gap

Despite the growing amount of literature on AI in marketing, a gap remains in understanding how marketing professionals accept and use GenAI in their creative work, and how leaders guide and support this adoption within their organisations. Research on AI in marketing has expanded rapidly as the technology continues to transform marketing functions and decision-making processes (Jain & Aggarwal, 2020; Verma et al., 2021; Wladawsky-Berger, 2017). Previous studies have explored the broad application of AI across various marketing functions (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022), as well as its influence on customer engagement, experience, and personalisation (Ameen et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2025). More recent research has started to address the potential of GenAI to reshape creative and strategic marketing work (Kshetri, 2024; Liu et al., 2024). However, there is still limited empirical understanding of how these technologies are integrated into the everyday creative practices of marketing professionals and how they are supported by organisational leadership.

Recent research has also begun to explore the organisational factors that affect AI adoption and implementation. A study by Rai (2025) examines the obstacles that prevent small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the United Kingdom from effectively adopting AI in their marketing activities. The research identified several critical barriers, including limited knowledge and understanding of AI, and a lack of trust in both AI technologies and providers. While the study provides valuable insights into the organisational and cognitive barriers that influence AI adoption among SMEs, its focus remains on the smaller enterprises and managerial decision-making, and addresses AI adoption in general, not for specific tasks or responsibilities. Another study by Chen et al. (2021) develops a conceptual framework for AI adoption in business-to-business (B2B) marketing. The research identifies key drivers of AI adoption, such as shortcomings of current marketing activities and external pressures of digitalisation, as well as several outcomes, including improved efficiency, accuracy, and decision-making. While the study offers valuable theoretical insights into the organisational drivers, barriers, and consequences of AI adoption, its focus lies on B2B marketing and AI adoption in general.

A particularly relevant recent contribution is the qualitative study by Wahid et al. (2025), which examines how generative AI reshapes the content marketing agency landscape. Their findings show that GenAI redistributes core content creation, technical, and economic capabilities across the market, enabling clients to perform tasks that were previously outsourced to agencies and thereby altering long-standing agency–client dynamics. While this study provides an important perspective on capability redistribution and changing market structures, it does not examine how GenAI affects the day-to-day creative practices of individual marketing professionals, nor how organisational leaders support and govern this transition within their teams.

Taken together, existing research has examined AI adoption at organisational and market levels, but there is still limited empirical understanding of how generative AI is accepted and used within the creative workflows of marketing agencies, and how leaders shape the conditions that support or constrain this adoption. Little is known about how creative professionals work with GenAI tools in practice, how they evaluate their usefulness, or what organisational and individual factors influence their willingness to integrate GenAI into content production processes. This gap highlights the need for research that connects technology acceptance theory with the realities of creative agency work, providing insight into both practical experiences and organisational dynamics.

## **1.2 Research objective and questions**

The objective of this thesis is to explore how GenAI is accepted and used in content marketing production within marketing agencies. The thesis examines how creative professionals and leaders perceive and integrate GenAI tools into their workflows, and what individual, organisational, and environmental factors influence their acceptance and use. Hence, the following research question has been formulated to support the objective:

*How is generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) accepted and used in content marketing production within marketing agencies?*

To further examine each area separately, the following questions have been formulated to support the main research question:

1. In what ways are GenAI applications used in creative work among marketing professionals?
2. How do creative professionals perceive the usefulness of GenAI tools in content marketing production?
3. What individual, organisational, and environmental factors influence the acceptance and use of GenAI in content marketing production?

By achieving this objective, the thesis aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the understanding of GenAI adoption in marketing. The study extends existing technology acceptance research by applying it to the creative context of content marketing production, while also providing practical insights for marketing agencies on how to support the effective, ethical, and strategically aligned use of GenAI in creative work.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic and research background, as well as the objective and research questions of the thesis. Following the introduction, the second chapter provides a literature review outlining the study's relevant theoretical foundations. It begins with an overview of GenAI in marketing, introducing its key characteristics, capabilities, and applications in the marketing context. This is followed by a discussion of AI in creative and content marketing production, highlighting how generative technologies are transforming creative work and content creation. The chapter then presents the factors influencing GenAI acceptance and adoption, introducing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the theoretical

framework within the discussion of individual-level factors, before examining the organisational and environmental factors that shape how GenAI is implemented and used in marketing agencies.

The third chapter introduces the research methodology and explains how data is collected and analysed. It outlines the qualitative research design, interview process, and key considerations related to trustworthiness and research ethics. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the empirical study and provides an analysis of the collected data. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes the thesis by addressing the research questions and discussing the key theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

## **2 Literature review**

This chapter reviews the existing literature relevant to the use and acceptance of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in marketing, with a particular focus on content production. The aim is to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study, drawing together research on GenAI technologies, their applications in marketing, and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which forms the theoretical lens for examining adoption and acceptance. The literature reviewed here has been collected through a structured search of peer-reviewed academic publications, focusing on studies that address AI in marketing, content marketing production, marketing agencies, technology acceptance, and organisational adoption of AI. This chapter synthesises these perspectives to identify what is already known and where gaps remain, laying the groundwork for the empirical study that follows.

### **2.1 GenAI in marketing**

AI has been widely recognised as a transformative technology across a range of sectors and industries (Dennehy et al., 2023, p. 1). AI is commonly defined as the capability of computer systems to perform cognitive functions associated with human intelligence, including problem-solving, perception, and communication, using algorithmic and statistical methods (Huang & Rust, 2021, p. 210; Zhang & Agnihotri, 2025, p. 151). Recent advancements in AI have introduced new paradigms of machine processing, shifting from data-driven and discriminative tasks toward more sophisticated and creative applications enabled by GenAI. By leveraging deep generative models, GenAI can produce novel and realistic content, such as text, images, and programming code, across diverse domains in response to user prompts (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 1). As marketing increasingly relies on data-driven decision-making and content-intensive communication, GenAI offers capabilities that align closely with the sector's growing demand for scalable, personalised, and rapid content production (Huang & Rust, 2021, p. 209; Labib, 2024, p. 7; Veling & Sellappan, 2024, p. 1; Wahid et al., 2025, p. 1).

GenAI has been characterised as a significant disruptive force within the digital ecosystem (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 1), reshaping the established role and value proposition of content marketing agencies (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 1). By broadening access to sophisticated creative and technical capabilities that were previously limited to specialists or well-resourced organisations, GenAI fundamentally alters who can produce high-quality content and how such work is carried out (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 3). In creative work, GenAI supports content production by automating early-stage generation, assisting with copywriting, producing rapid draft versions, and providing a foundation for further refinement (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 10; Gao et al., 2023, p. 2; Wahid et al., 2025, p. 8). These capabilities can substantially increase productivity by reducing reliance on time- and resource-intensive manual processes.

Beyond text-based applications, GenAI enables the creation of multimodal and multilingual content, allowing teams to work across images, video, audio, and multiple languages within a unified workflow (Gao et al., 2023, p. 10; Wahid et al., 2025, p. 6). This includes the production of visual marketing materials, such as images and synthetic or dynamic videos, as well as audio and speech-based assets, supporting faster, more targeted multimedia content creation while lowering traditional time and cost constraints (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 6; Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 4; Gao et al., 2023, p. 2; Khan & Hasan Emon, 2024, p. 177). Beyond execution-focused tasks, GenAI also supports the strategic dimensions of content production by assisting with idea generation, identifying relevant content themes, and optimising content strategies (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 2-12). In addition, generative AI enables large-scale personalisation and localisation, allowing teams to tailor content to specific audiences or regions with greater speed, consistency, and scalability than traditional approaches (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 4).

### **2.1.1 AI in creative and content marketing production**

Although AI has been present in marketing for many years, the launch of ChatGPT in 2022 significantly increased public awareness and accessibility of GenAI, marking a turning point in its widespread adoption (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 1). Since then, the adoption of GenAI has rapidly accelerated (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 3). Content marketing, a strategic component of digital marketing, centres on creating and distributing consistent, relevant, and valuable digital content to attract and retain a specific audience. By producing personalised and useful material aligned with a defined content strategy, organisations seek to build trust, loyalty, and long-term customer relationships (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 2).

For content marketing agencies, which provide the creative, technical, and strategic expertise needed to execute these activities on behalf of clients, the rapid acceleration of GenAI adoption requires adaptation across multiple dimensions, including strategic positioning, operational processes, ethical and regulatory considerations, and how they engage with clients in a changing technological landscape (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 12). This shift is also reshaping the capabilities and roles within agencies: rather than focusing solely on content production, future value is increasingly associated with expertise-driven roles, such as acting as creative content marketing experts and strategic advisors to clients (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 9).

As GenAI becomes more deeply embedded in creative workflows, agencies must also navigate its limitations. GenAI models are prone to producing output errors, often referred to as hallucinations, where the system generates confident but factually incorrect information (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 9). Such risks, including the potential for misinformation, inaccuracies, and other content-quality issues, present important challenges for agencies aiming to maintain authenticity, accuracy, and brand safety in their work (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 6). In addition to these immediate content-quality risks, GenAI is associated with broader systemic challenges related to data bias, opacity, and the potential for misuse, which stem from the large-scale, often large, loosely structured

datasets on which these models are trained (Banh & Strobel, 2023, p. 7-9). These challenges illustrate that the integration of GenAI into creative work is not purely a technical issue, but one that raises broader questions about responsibility, control, and accountability within agency practices (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 13).

Concerns also extend to the creative and relational dimensions of content production. Many practitioners emphasise that human judgment and creativity continue to play an essential role, noting that content marketing cannot rely solely on AI-driven outputs (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 13). There is also a growing worry that AI-generated material may feel less authentic to audiences, reinforcing the need for careful human oversight in the creative process (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 12). Another commonly noted challenge is the tendency for shared generative models to produce similar styles or patterns across outputs. This can result in content that feels homogeneous or less creatively distinctive, making it harder for agencies to maintain a clear brand voice and deliver truly differentiated work for their clients (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 6). As GenAI becomes more embedded in client-facing deliverables, agencies are also reassessing how creative responsibility is distributed, particularly as clients gain direct access to tools that previously required agency expertise (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 3).

Despite these challenges, agencies remain motivated to adopt GenAI due to the perceived operational benefits it may offer. A central driver behind adoption is the expectation that AI can reduce workload pressures and lower production costs (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 2). GenAI tools further contribute to this by speeding up content creation processes and reducing reliance on resource-intensive manual work (Khan & Hasan Emon, 2024, p. 177). By automating routine or repetitive tasks, AI allows creative teams to redirect their time toward higher-level strategic work (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 8). In this strategic capacity, GenAI also supports planning and curation efforts by helping teams organise, refine, and align content with audience needs and broader marketing objectives (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 2-12).

## **2.2 Factors influencing AI acceptance and adoption**

The adoption and acceptance of GenAI in marketing agencies are shaped by a combination of individual, organisational, and environmental factors that extend beyond the technological characteristics of the tools themselves. The following analysis draws on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and particularly its core constructs of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. While technology acceptance models highlight the importance of perceived usefulness and ease of use at the individual level, prior research emphasises that these perceptions are embedded within broader organisational structures, professional roles, and environmental pressures (Chuttur, 2009; Marangunić & Granić, 2014; Yurder, 2025). In the context of marketing agencies, individual perceptions of GenAI are therefore not formed in isolation but are continuously shaped by the organisational conditions in which creative work takes place and by the competitive and relational dynamics of the wider industry environment. Understanding how these three levels interact is essential for examining why and how GenAI is accepted and used in content marketing production.

### **2.2.1 Individual-level factors**

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is one of the most widely applied frameworks for explaining how individuals come to accept and use new technologies. Rooted in the psychology-based Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), TAM provides a theoretical foundation to understand the cognitive process of technology adoption (Marangunić & Granić, 2014, p. 81). Originally developed by Fred Davis in 1989 and later synthesised and extended across disciplines, TAM proposes that technology adoption is primarily driven by two core beliefs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Chuttur, 2009, p. 2). Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a particular technology will enhance their job performance, while perceived ease of use captures the degree to which the technology is perceived as effortless to use (Chuttur,

2009, p. 5). These perceptions shape users' attitudes toward the technology and, ultimately, their intention to adopt it. In recent years, TAM has been increasingly applied in business, marketing, and artificial intelligence contexts, demonstrating its continued relevance in explaining the acceptance of emerging digital technologies (Yurder, 2025, p. 499).

Within the context of marketing agencies, TAM offers a particularly suitable framework for examining how creative professionals assess and adopt generative AI tools in their everyday work. Agency environments are typically characterised by fast-paced workflows, tight deadlines, and high client expectations, alongside strong norms related to creativity and quality (Mogaji et al., 2024, p. 3325; Swart & Kinnie, 2007, p. 344). In such settings, individual perceptions of a technology's usefulness and ease of use become especially important, as tools are often judged by their ability to enhance efficiency, support creative output, and contribute to client satisfaction (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 4). As a result, TAM helps to explain why some GenAI tools are embraced as valuable additions to creative workflows, while others may be resisted or only partially adopted. While TAM forms the core theoretical lens of this thesis, the model is extended here to account for the organisational and environmental factors that shape individual perceptions, as examined in the sections that follow.

Individual-level factors are closely tied to the multiple professional roles within agency teams. Designers, copywriters, content strategists, and video editors engage with GenAI tools in different ways and may therefore form distinct perceptions of usefulness and ease of use. Creative professionals may value GenAI for its capacity to support ideation, generate draft content, or accelerate repetitive tasks, while simultaneously remaining cautious about its impact on originality and creative judgement (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024, p. 2; Wahid et al., 2025, p. 8). Concerns related to professional identity, creative autonomy, and the perceived threat to human creativity can negatively influence acceptance, even when efficiency gains are recognised (Liu et al., 2024, p. 295; Mogaji et al., 2024, p. 3328; Wahid et al., 2025, p. 6). These findings suggest that acceptance is not uniform

across agency roles but is shaped by how GenAI aligns with role-specific tasks, skills, and values.

Within this individual experience of GenAI, perceived usefulness emerges as a particularly influential determinant of adoption (Ma et al., 2025, p. 1433). Creative professionals are likely to evaluate GenAI tools in relation to their capacity to accelerate content production, support ideation, enable scalability across campaigns, or assist in meeting client demands under time pressure (Swart & Kinnie, 2007, p. 344). When GenAI is perceived to enhance such performance outcomes, it is more likely to be incorporated into everyday creative practices rather than remaining experimental or detached (Khan & Hasan Emon, 2024, p. 181). This reflects TAM's core proposition that perceived usefulness is a primary driver of technology adoption, particularly in performance-oriented professional contexts (Yurder, 2025, p. 498–499).

Perceived ease of use also plays an important role in shaping GenAI acceptance within marketing agencies (Ma et al., 2025, p. 1438). In fast-paced agency environments where time for formal training is often limited, tools that are intuitive and easily embedded into existing workflows may encounter fewer barriers to adoption (Ma et al., 2025, p. 1439). However, some research suggests that ease of use may be secondary to perceived usefulness when professionals anticipate significant performance gains. Creative professionals may be willing to invest effort in learning more complex tools if the expected benefits for efficiency or creative output are sufficiently high (Chuttur, 2009, p. 9; Marangunić & Granić, 2014, p. 85). This hierarchy of priorities reflects the performance-driven nature of agency work, where practical utility tends to outweigh frictionless usability.

### **2.2.2 Organisational-level factors**

At the organisational level, leadership plays a central role in shaping how GenAI is perceived, authorised, and integrated into agency work. Strategic guidance from leaders influences whether GenAI is framed as a supportive creative tool, a productivity enhancer,

or a potential threat to established practices (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 7–10). Leadership decisions regarding investment in AI tools, allocation of time for experimentation, and the availability of training and support can meaningfully affect employees' willingness to adopt GenAI (Khan & Hasan Emon, 2024, p. 181). Research by Mogaji et al. (2024, p. 3327) suggests that organisational clarity and governance structures influence how professionals perceive and accept AI tools. In agency contexts, aligning GenAI use with established creative guidelines and brand standards may help reduce uncertainty and resistance by anchoring AI-assisted work to familiar quality expectations. Conversely, a lack of organisational guidance or inconsistent leadership may increase perceived risk and constrain adoption.

The ethical and managerial dimensions of GenAI adoption are closely intertwined with these organisational dynamics. The use of GenAI introduces ethical risks related to misinformation, biased outputs, transparency, and unclear accountability, particularly when AI-generated content is integrated into professional services (Huang et al., 2023, p. 802; Wahid et al., 2025, p. 13). These concerns highlight the need for responsible AI governance frameworks within agencies, ensuring that human oversight remains central to creative decision-making.

Closely related to transparency are questions of copyright and authorship. GenAI challenges established understandings of creative ownership by blurring the boundaries between human and machine contributions. The uncertainty surrounding intellectual property rights, training data, and creative ownership represents a growing ethical and legal concern for organisations using GenAI in creative production (Huang et al., 2023, p. 2; Safdar et al., 2020, p. 2). Marketing agencies must therefore carefully consider how ownership of AI-assisted outputs is defined and how client-owned materials, prompts, or generated content are handled in order to avoid disputes and ethical ambiguity. Data handling and privacy constitute a further organisational concern, as AI systems often rely on large-scale data processing, raising questions about data security, misuse, and the unintended exposure of confidential information (Huang et al., 2023, p. 4; Mogaji et al.,

2024, p. 3331). Given that marketing agencies frequently work with sensitive client information, including brand assets, customer insights, and campaign data, ensuring responsible data governance is essential for maintaining trust and complying with ethical and regulatory expectations.

Leaders are responsible for establishing clear guidelines for GenAI use, providing training and support, and ensuring that teams understand both the opportunities and the limitations of these tools. Clear policies and risk-reduction practices can reduce resistance to GenAI adoption while fostering confidence among employees and clients alike (Khan & Hasan Emon, 2024, p. 181). Leadership involvement is also critical for maintaining quality control, mitigating the risks of biased or inaccurate outputs, and preserving integrity in AI-assisted work. As GenAI adoption expands, agencies are increasingly expected to extend this guidance to clients, many of whom experiment with GenAI tools without the knowledge to use them effectively or responsibly. In response, agencies are beginning to adopt advisory and enablement roles, offering services such as onboarding support, prompt-writing workshops, governance templates, and co-designed workflow practices (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 12). By supporting clients in developing internal AI maturity, agencies position themselves not only as content producers but as strategic partners and capability enablers.

From a technology acceptance perspective, these organisational and ethical conditions are closely related to the core constructs of TAM. Concerns related to transparency, data handling, content accuracy, and responsible governance can directly influence how useful GenAI tools are perceived to be, particularly when risks to brand safety, client trust, or creative integrity are present. Similarly, unclear guidelines, weak oversight, or insufficient training may increase perceived complexity and uncertainty, thereby negatively affecting perceived ease of use. Strong leadership, clear policies, and responsible AI governance frameworks can therefore support positive perceptions of both usefulness and usability by reducing risk, increasing trust, and enabling more confident integration of GenAI into everyday creative workflows.

### 2.2.3 Environmental factors

Environmental factors related to the broader industry context further shape GenAI adoption within marketing agencies. Client expectations constitute a significant source of external pressure in this regard. Marketing agencies operate within close client relationships in which trust, perceived value, and service differentiation are central (Swart & Kinnie, 2007, p. 345). As clients increasingly experiment with GenAI tools themselves, agencies face growing pressure to demonstrate efficiency, innovation, and strategic relevance while maintaining creative quality and brand consistency (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 6). These demands can encourage agencies to adopt GenAI to meet expectations for speed, scalability, and personalisation, while simultaneously constraining how openly and extensively GenAI can be used in client-facing deliverables.

A key challenge in this regard concerns transparency and disclosure in agency-client relationships. As AI-supported content becomes more prevalent, clients may reasonably expect clarity regarding when and how GenAI tools are used in content production. Transparency has been identified as a critical condition for trust and legitimacy in AI-enabled professional contexts, particularly when outputs affect external stakeholders (Etzioni & Etzioni, 2017, p. 406; Eurofound, 2023, p. 18–19).

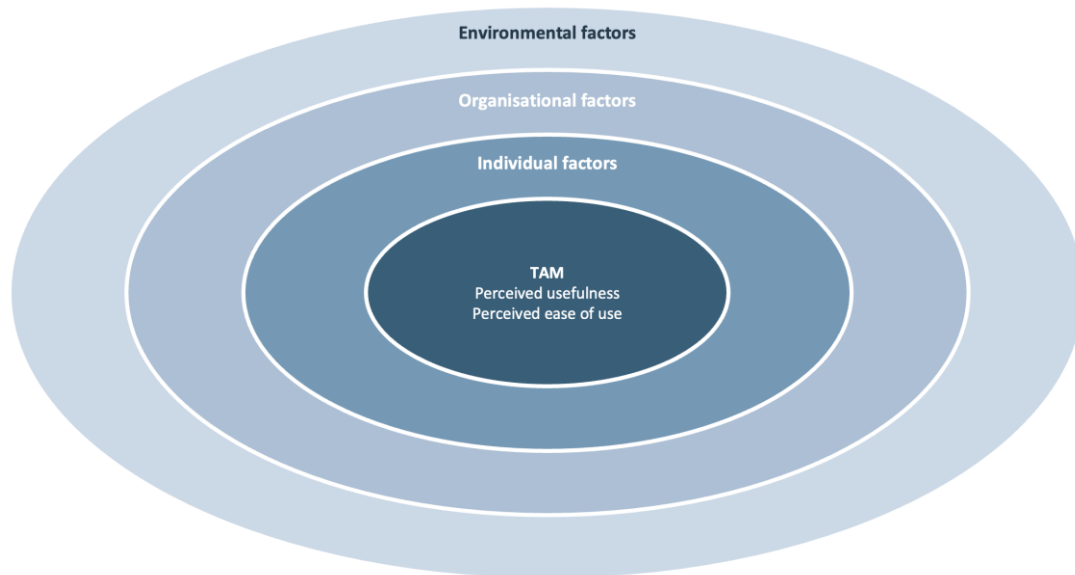
Beyond client expectations, agencies operate in highly competitive markets characterised by rapid technological change, short innovation cycles, and sustained pressure to differentiate services (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 2). The widespread availability of GenAI tools has lowered barriers to entry for content production, intensifying competition and increasing the urgency for agencies to adopt new technologies in order to remain competitive (Kshetri, 2024, p. 15). At the same time, varying levels of client readiness and AI maturity across industries create uneven adoption pressures, requiring agencies to balance innovation with caution depending on client context (Eurofound, 2023, p. 18).

Alongside these operational motivations, shifting market dynamics are also accelerating GenAI adoption. As advanced content-creation capabilities become accessible to a broad range of users and organisations, clients may perceive less differentiation between agency services and AI-assisted alternatives, leading to a reduced willingness to pay for traditional content marketing work (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 6). This shift places agencies under growing pressure to adopt AI to maintain efficiency, demonstrate value, and remain competitive (Khan & Hasan Emon, 2024, p. 181). By accelerating content production and enabling the rapid creation of personalised and localised materials, GenAI allows agencies to respond more quickly to client expectations and market demands, reinforcing its role as a key driver of operational performance in content marketing (Gao et al., 2023, p. 10).

These environmental pressures distinguish marketing agencies from other organisational contexts frequently examined in AI adoption literature, such as small and medium-sized enterprises or business-to-business firms. Unlike internal marketing departments, agencies must continuously justify their value to external clients while coordinating creative work across multiple brands, industries, and strategic objectives (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 4). Agency adoption of GenAI is therefore influenced not only by internal efficiency considerations but also by external perceptions of expertise, credibility, and creative leadership.

Taken together, the acceptance and adoption of GenAI in marketing agencies emerge from the interaction of individual role perceptions, organisational structures and governance practices, and broader industry dynamics. These factors shape how GenAI is evaluated, experimented with, and embedded into creative workflows, reinforcing the need to examine GenAI acceptance within agencies as a socially and organisationally situated process rather than a purely individual or technical decision. This multi-level perspective provides the conceptual foundation for the empirical study that follows, and positions TAM not as a self-contained explanatory model but as a framework whose core constructs, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, are themselves conditioned by

the organisational and environmental context in which creative professionals work. The relationship between these three levels and TAM's core constructs is illustrated in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework: TAM extended with individual, organisational, and environmental factors

### **3 Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to study how marketing professionals and leaders accept and use generative AI in content marketing production. It presents the research design, describes the data collection process through semi-structured interviews, and explains how the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The chapter also discusses issues of reliability, validity, and research ethics, ensuring transparency and trustworthiness in how the empirical study was conducted.

#### **3.1 Research design and approach**

This study adopted a qualitative research design with an interpretivist approach, as the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of how GenAI is used and accepted within the creative work of marketing agencies. This approach was suitable for this research, as it recognised that individuals' perceptions of technology are shaped by their professional roles, experiences, and organisational contexts (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 150-151). In marketing agencies, creative work is essentially subjective and varies across functions such as copywriting, design, strategy, and leadership, making qualitative research well-suited for capturing these diverse viewpoints.

More specifically, the study followed a social constructionist perspective within the interpretivist approach. From this perspective, reality is constructed through social interaction, as people within organisations develop shared understandings through their interactions with one another (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 137). In organisational settings, this implies that realities are not fixed or objective, but are continuously shaped through everyday practices, language, and interactions. This made it suitable for studying marketing agencies, where creative work is essentially collaborative, and professionals in different roles may experience and interpret GenAI in various ways. Thus, the study recognised that different people within the same organisation may experience GenAI very

differently and aimed to understand how those experiences take shape in an agency setting.

A case study logic was employed, with marketing agencies serving as the organisational setting of the research. Case studies are particularly appropriate when the research seeks to explore contemporary phenomena within real-life organisational contexts and to answer “how” and “why” questions (Mali, 2023, p. 61). Marketing agencies provided a rich context for this study, as they bring together creative production, client work, and fast-moving technological change. Focusing on agencies allowed the study to examine GenAI adoption within real-world organisational structures, workflows, and leadership practices, rather than in abstract or experimental settings.

The aim of the case study approach was not to produce findings that could be generalised statistically, but to examine how concepts related to technology acceptance play out in a real organisational setting (Mali, 2023, p. 61). Accordingly, the goal of the study was not to test predefined hypotheses but to develop an understanding of how creative professionals and leaders make sense of GenAI in their everyday work. By examining both individual experiences as well as organisational and environmental perspectives, this approach supported a broader exploration of the factors influencing GenAI acceptance and adoption within marketing content production

### **3.2 Data collection**

This study utilised semi-structured interviews as the primary method of empirical data collection in order to gain in-depth insights into how GenAI is accepted and used in content marketing production within marketing agencies. Semi-structured interviews were well-suited for this research as they allowed for flexibility in exploring participants’ experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, while still providing a consistent structure to address the core themes of the study.

The interview guide was based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and was adapted to the creative and organisational context of marketing agencies. It is showcased in **Appendix 1**. The questions explored the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of GenAI tools in relation to agency-specific tasks such as ideation, copywriting, design, content planning, and client delivery. In addition, the interviews addressed contextual factors including agency culture, workflows, time pressures, leadership practices, and client expectations, recognising their influence on how GenAI tools are accepted and adopted in everyday creative work.

### **3.2.1 Overview of participating agencies**

The empirical data for this study was collected from four Finnish marketing agencies, selected to represent variation in organisational size, service focus, and level of GenAI adoption. Together, the agencies provide a broad cross-section of the Finnish marketing agency landscape, ranging from small specialist operations to large full-service agencies with an established market position.

The participating agencies varied considerably in scale. The sample included a small agency with fewer than 20 employees, a mid-sized agency with between 50 and 100 employees, a large agency that is part of an international group, and an extra-large agency with several hundred employees operating across multiple domestic locations. This variation in size reflects meaningfully different organisational structures, resource levels, and capacities to manage technological change, which are relevant to understanding how GenAI adoption is shaped by organisational context.

In terms of service offering, all four agencies were engaged in content marketing production as a core activity, ensuring comparability across the sample. Beyond this shared focus, the agencies differed in their broader positioning. Some combined content production with strategic advisory, marketing technology, and digital performance services, while others maintained a stronger emphasis on creative production or media planning.

This diversity of positioning allowed the study to examine GenAI adoption across a range of creative and strategic roles rather than within a single service model.

The sample also reflected variation in the extent to which GenAI had been integrated into agency workflows at the time of the interviews, ranging from agencies in early exploratory stages to those with more structured and deliberate approaches to GenAI implementation. Two participants from each agency were interviewed, representing both creative and leadership perspectives within each organisational context. The roles included creative directors, digital marketing strategists, video producers, and senior leaders with responsibility for strategy and AI development. This range of roles enabled the study to capture perspectives from both those who work directly with GenAI tools and those responsible for guiding, supporting, and shaping its adoption at an organisational level.

**Table 1** provides an overview of the eight participants, identified by a code that combines their professional role with agency size. The coding system is used consistently throughout the findings chapter to indicate the source of perspectives discussed. All interview excerpts cited in the findings chapter have been translated from Finnish into English by the author. The translations aim to preserve the original meaning and tone of the participants' words as closely as possible.

**Table 1.** Overview of the participants

Code	Role	Agency size	Interview language	Format	Duration	Date
<b>SL/S</b>	Senior Leader	Small	Finnish	Online	52 min	23.3.2026
<b>DS/S</b>	Digital Marketing Strategist	Small	Finnish	In-person	39 min	25.3.2026
<b>CL/M</b>	Creative Lead	Medium	Finnish	Online	44 min	20.4.2026
<b>VP/M</b>	Video Producer	Medium	Finnish	Online	36 min	21.4.2026
<b>SL/L</b>	Senior Leader	Large	Finnish	In-person	59 min	25.3.2026
<b>CL/L</b>	Creative Lead	Large	Finnish	Online	62 min	25.3.2026
<b>SL/XL</b>	Senior Leader	Extra large	Finnish	Online	54 min	17.4.2026
<b>CD/XL</b>	Creative Director	Extra large	Finnish	Online	50 min	17.4.2026

### 3.2.2 Data analysis

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, a flexible qualitative method well suited to identifying patterns of meaning across participants' experiences while remaining sensitive to contextual variation. Thematic analysis enables researchers to explore how individuals interpret and make sense of phenomena within their specific organisational and professional contexts, making it particularly appropriate for studying creative work and technology use in marketing agencies (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 808).

The analysis followed a six-phase approach. First, all transcripts were read in full before any coding began. Notes were made on recurring ideas and first impressions, so that each interview could be understood as a whole before moving on to a more detailed analysis.

Secondly, codes were assigned manually by going through each transcript and labelling sections that seemed relevant to the research questions. Codes stayed close to the

words used by the participants and were not yet grouped or interpreted. Each transcript was coded on its own before any comparisons between interviews were made.

Thirdly, codes were grouped into potential themes based on the ideas and experiences they had in common. This was guided both by what emerged from the data and by the TAM framework, which drew attention to perceived usefulness and ease of use as key categories. The grouping was not straightforward: some codes that initially seemed to belong together were later separated, and others that seemed different were merged. Themes were also allowed to come from the data itself, where TAM did not cover them. The clearest example of this was professional identity, which came up repeatedly across different roles and agencies but did not fit neatly into TAM's existing categories.

Fourthly, the themes were checked against the full dataset to make sure each one was well supported, clear in its focus, and different enough from the others. This phase also checked that the themes as a whole covered the full range of what the data contained, including views that were less common or that stood in contrast to the main patterns.

After that, the final themes were defined and named. Four themes were identified, each corresponding to one section of the findings chapter. The first covered current GenAI use in content production, including the tools, tasks, and workflows involved. The second addressed individual-level factors shaping acceptance and adoption, covering perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, professional identity, skill erosion, and questions of creative quality and authenticity. The third brought together the organisational-level factors that enable or constrain adoption, including leadership and governance, data security, copyright and intellectual property, and training and knowledge sharing. The fourth examined environmental factors, including client expectations and competitive pressure. All four themes were rooted in TAM and the individual, organisational, and environmental factors from the literature review, while also leaving room for what went beyond the framework, as was the case with professional identity, which emerged from the data rather than from TAM's existing constructs.

Finally, the findings were written up by moving from what individual participants described toward broader patterns and meaning. Where views differed, whether between agencies of different sizes, between people in leadership and hands-on roles, or between those who had been using GenAI for longer and those who were newer to it, these differences were treated as meaningful rather than as exceptions.

### **3.3 Trustworthiness and ethical considerations**

This study followed a framework presented by Guba (1981), which proposes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as key criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research (p. 80). In this study, credibility was supported by focusing on participants' own thoughts of how GenAI is used and understood within their agency roles. Interviewing professionals in different creative and leadership positions allowed the study to capture multiple perspectives and the use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences in their own words (Guba, 1981, p. 80).

Transferability was addressed by clearly describing the organisational context and by selecting agencies that offer comparable creative and content marketing services. Rather than aiming for generalisation, the study provides sufficient contextual details to allow readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar environments (Guba, 1981, p. 80). Dependability was supported through a transparent and systematic research process, including consistent interview processes and a clearly documented approach (Guba, 1981, p. 81). Confirmability was supported through careful data handling and researcher self-awareness. As the researcher had prior knowledge of marketing and creative work, particular attention was given to ensuring that interpretations followed the participants' accounts rather than personal assumptions (Guba, 1981, p. 81).

In terms of ethical considerations, anonymity was prioritised due to the competitive nature of the marketing agency industry and the sensitivity of client-related information. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with a data protection notice detailing how their personal data would be collected, processed, stored, and used in accordance with applicable data protection legislation. All data were stored and handled securely throughout the research process.

### **3.4 Usage of artificial intelligence tools**

In the preparation of this thesis, several artificial intelligence tools were used to support the writing and research process. Claude Sonnet 4.6 (Anthropic), ChatGPT-5.1 and ChatGPT-5.2 (OpenAI) were used to assist with the ideation of the research topic, structuring and organising content, refining academic language, and improving the clarity and coherence of written text. Gemini 3 Flash (Google) was used to search for and identify relevant previous research. Grammarly was used throughout the writing process to check grammar, spelling, and language consistency.

All AI-assisted text was critically reviewed, revised, and verified by the author. The intellectual content, argumentation, interpretation of sources, and academic judgements presented in this thesis are the author's own. AI tools were not used to generate or substitute original analysis, and all sources cited in the thesis were independently read and evaluated by the author.

## 4 Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, drawing on semi-structured interviews with eight marketing professionals across four Finnish marketing agencies. The agencies vary in size, ranging from a small agency of fewer than twenty employees to an extra-large agency with several hundred. Two participants were interviewed in each agency, one in a senior leadership or strategic role and one in a more hands-on creative or operational role. This structure makes it possible to compare how GenAI is perceived and used not only across agencies of different sizes, but also between people operating at different levels within the same organisation.

To protect the confidentiality of both the individuals and their organisations, no agencies or participants are identified by name in this chapter. Participants are referred to by the coding system introduced in section 3.2.1, which combines their professional role with the size of their agency. All interview excerpts cited in the findings chapter have been translated from Finnish into English by the author. The translations aim to preserve the original meaning and tone of the participants' words as closely as possible.

The findings are organised around four themes. The first covers the current use of GenAI in content production. The second addresses individual-level factors that shape how GenAI is perceived and used in creative work. The third examines organisational-level factors that enable or constrain adoption. The fourth covers environmental factors, including client expectations and competitive pressure. All four themes are grounded in the TAM and the individual, organisational, and environmental factors identified in the literature review.

### 4.1 Current use of generative AI in content production

Generative AI tools are in active use across all four agencies in the study, though the range of tools used, the tasks they are applied to, and how formally that use is organised

differ considerably depending on agency size. Larger agencies have moved beyond individual experimentation and invested in dedicated resources, like AI development teams, custom tool environments that allow staff to access multiple language models through a single interface, and structured programmes for sharing knowledge internally. In these organisations, adoption rates are high across the workforce, with several leaders describing GenAI use as a daily habit for the large majority of their staff.

*"The biggest uses are for everyday work: summarising information, translating, ideating, sparring, writing support. I think we did a survey in January and 70 percent of our people use AI every day and 95 percent every week." (SL/XL)*

Across agencies of all sizes, senior professionals describe using GenAI to handle the mental load of complex, multi-stranded work. This includes summarising where things stand on ongoing projects, structuring input from meetings and client conversations into usable starting points and keeping track of multiple workstreams at once. For people in leadership and strategic roles, this kind of behind-the-scenes use is often described as the most practically useful thing GenAI does for them day to day.

*"Thankfully there is AI, so it is easy to jump from one project to another. I can ask the AI, so where did I leave off, what do I need to do now." (SL/S)*

Across all four agencies, the most consistently reported use of GenAI is in text-based tasks. Language models are used for drafting, editing, translating, and producing different versions of copy across campaigns and channels. Participants describe tasks that once took an hour as now taking a fraction of that time, and the ability to generate multiple versions of the same message for different audiences or languages is frequently highlighted as a practical time-saving. At the same time, all participants are consistent on one point: text produced by GenAI is never published directly. It always passes through human review and editing before any content reaches a client or a public channel. This norm holds across all agencies and all roles, and is described both as a quality standard and as a way of maintaining professional responsibility over the final output.

*"It is always a human who checks what goes out and what the final version is." (CD/XL)*

Beyond text, GenAI is actively used for visual concept work, particularly in the early stages of creative development. Participants across all agencies describe generating rough visual mockups to illustrate campaign ideas to clients before any production budget is committed. These concept images are generally understood as internal working tools rather than finished deliverables. Whether AI-generated visuals go on to become part of the final work depends heavily on the client, the content type, and what the agency has agreed regarding copyright and intellectual property. For still imagery, the threshold is lower: several participants note that the quality of generative image tools has improved to the point where AI-produced images are difficult to distinguish from photography in many contexts. For video, however, all agencies are more cautious. Those that have experimented with AI-generated video report that consumer and client reactions are more sensitive, particularly when the content features human figures, and that the level of control over the output is still not reliable enough for most client-facing work. Practitioners describe investing significant time in generating short clips only to find that the tool has introduced unwanted elements that cannot be easily corrected.

Audio production is one area where GenAI use appears to be the most established. Voice synthesis and voice adaptation tools have become practical solutions for tasks such as correcting a spoken fact in an existing voiceover without returning to the studio or producing localised versions of audio content for different markets. Several participants describe using these tools to resolve production problems quickly in situations where the traditional approach would have been much slower or more costly.

The use of GenAI in strategic and planning work is less uniform but increasingly present, particularly in larger agencies. Senior professionals describe using language models to structure large volumes of input material, such as client briefs, meeting transcripts, and email threads, into usable starting points for strategy development. In smaller agencies, similar uses are reported at the individual level, including using AI tools to keep track of multiple simultaneous projects and to pick up quickly on where work left off. Across all agencies, participants describe these behind-the-scenes uses as representing the most

significant day-to-day productivity gain from GenAI, more so than the substitution of any specific creative task.

## 4.2 Individual factors shaping GenAI acceptance and adoption

The following sections examine the individual-level factors that shape how marketing professionals perceive and use GenAI in their creative work. These include the TAM constructs of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, as well as factors that emerged from the data and extend beyond the framework, including professional identity, concerns about skill erosion, and questions about creative quality and authenticity.

### 4.2.1 Perceived usefulness

Perceived usefulness is a consistent driver of GenAI adoption across the sample, though what counts as useful varies considerably depending on a person's role. For those in senior leadership and strategic roles, usefulness is primarily understood in terms of time saved and mental load reduced. Tasks that previously required sustained individual effort, such as synthesising research from multiple sources, producing multiple drafts of the same document, or structuring a complex deliverable from scratch, can now be completed more quickly. Several participants in leadership roles describe this not only as a productivity benefit but as a quality-of-work benefit, noting that having GenAI handle preparatory and repetitive tasks frees up mental space for the judgement-intensive parts of the work.

*"AI has brought a lot of new perspective on different things, it brings different angles. But it also sometimes tells me something I did not necessarily even know."  
(SL/S)*

Usefulness also extends to the ability to work credibly across sectors where a practitioner may not have deep specialist knowledge, a point illustrated by a digital marketing strategist at a small agency.

*"Especially when you are working with a field where you are not yourself an expert, you really do get good tips from AI for the planning, based on that industry." (DS/S)*

For creative practitioners, perceived usefulness is framed more conditionally. A common position across the sample is that GenAI is most useful as a starting point generator and a versioning tool rather than as a creative agent in its own right. Participants describe prompting for a large volume of options, not because any single output is outstanding, but because the range of material is useful for identifying directions worth developing further. The value lies in the acceleration of early-stage exploration rather than in the quality of what is produced. This pattern holds across text, image, and audio work. In visual production, the ability to quickly generate concept images to test a creative direction before committing to a shoot or a detailed design is described as a significant practical benefit, particularly in agencies where production budgets are a constant constraint. In practical terms, perceived usefulness also manifests in concrete workflow benefits. A creative practitioner at a mid-sized agency describes using a language model not just for content production but for planning the most efficient way to complete a complex versioning task.

*"I can spar with Claude on what the best workflow is here. I need to produce a set with all the language versions, and I can use it to plan how to do that work efficiently." (CL/M)*

However, the relationship between perceived usefulness and actual productivity outcomes is more complicated than it first appears. Despite participants reporting clear individual time savings, one senior leader notes that company-level productivity figures have not grown proportionately, observing that freed capacity tends to get absorbed by other activities rather than generating a direct increase in output. This pattern echoes what the management literature describes as Parkinson's Law, and it suggests that realising the full potential of GenAI requires deliberate management of how freed time is redirected.

*"Based on some figures, companies' productivity has not grown much as a result of AI. You would think people are more efficient and get things done faster, but that efficiency somehow disappears." (SL/L)*

#### 4.2.2 Perceived ease of use

Perceived ease of use shapes GenAI adoption in ways that differ across roles and tool types. Language models are widely described as easy to use and quick to integrate into daily workflows, partly because prompting in natural language requires no technical learning curve. Visual and video tools present more varied experiences: interfaces that require complex parameter settings or non-intuitive workflows are associated with lower adoption rates, even when the quality of output is high.

*"Midjourney was originally used through Discord. That put quite a few people off. No matter how much it was taught and demonstrated, people did not want to use it." (CD/XL)*

In agencies where a curated set of approved tools has been introduced, practitioners report feeling more confident and less overwhelmed by the constant stream of new options. The organisational decision to standardise around particular tools reduces the cognitive burden of choice and allows staff to build genuine competence rather than repeatedly starting from scratch with new platforms.

*"We have managed to calm the field a bit. These are now our main tools. They enable quite a lot. We have gained a kind of peace to develop things on top of these." (CL/M)*

#### 4.2.3 Professional identity

A theme that runs through the interviews in a way that was not anticipated by the TAM framework is the relationship between GenAI use and professional identity. Among creative practitioners in particular, the question of what it means to use AI in one's work is not simply a practical one. It touches on how people understand what they do and what makes their contribution valuable. This concern surfaces across multiple roles and

agencies, suggesting it is a structural feature of how creative professionals in marketing agencies relate to GenAI rather than an individual reaction.

A video producer at a mid-sized agency describes how graphic designers have responded with particular intensity to the arrival of AI tools, framing it as a direct challenge to their professional standing.

*"The graphic designers in particular have been very protective of this, because their professional skills are genuinely being dismissed when the same things that used to take a day can now be done in a minute." (VP/M)*

A creative lead at the same agency describes how this tension manifests not as outright refusal but as emotional ambivalence, with enthusiasm and anxiety present simultaneously, sometimes shifting within the same person over the course of a single week.

*"There is quite a lot of anxiety in the design team about what this means. Now that everyone is doing everything with AI, illustrators soon won't have any work left. It is a bit of a balance, yes it has made things easier, but quite a lot of that anxiety has come along with it." (CL/M)*

A senior leader at a large agency describes the deeper dimension of this tension, connecting it to how creative professionals define their professional identity and communicate it to others.

*"Your identity as a content producer. Nobody wants to be called only a content producer. It reduces it to something that is just some media filling a blog somewhere." (SL/L)*

*"Some people own it straight away, this is just another tool among others, and the machine does what I want. But some are like, well that is not true, the machine wrote that thing, what did you even do? Then you get a bit of that feeling, oh I am worthless." (SL/L)*

This tension is not expressed as a refusal to use GenAI altogether, but as an ongoing negotiation in which practitioners work out for themselves where AI assistance ends and their own authorship begins. Some have settled into a position where directing and shaping the output of a language model or an image generator feels like just another tool in their work. Others describe a lingering feeling that the work is less their own when

AI has played a part in it. A notable pattern in the data is that younger creative professionals, particularly those who are newer to the industry, show more resistance to GenAI than their more experienced colleagues. Several participants interpret this as connected to career anxiety rather than to a resistance to new technology in general: for those who have not yet built a strong professional track record, the possibility of having their area of expertise automated feels more threatening.

#### **4.2.4 Skill erosion and changing work practices**

The efficiency gains are widely recognised across the sample, but participants also describe a more complicated side to working with GenAI. One theme that comes up in several interviews is what might be called a deskilling concern: the worry that relying on GenAI for tasks that were previously done manually may gradually erode the practitioner's own skills and willingness to engage with those tasks independently. This is not reported as a hypothetical risk but as a lived experience.

*"The same thing I have noticed myself and that colleagues have complained about too, you get this feeling that it makes you lazy and dumb. I am myself actually a good writer. These days I cannot be bothered to write anything myself." (VP/M)*

A related concern is that habitual AI use can produce a kind of uncritical reliance on the tool, where practitioners reach for a prompt even in situations where doing the work directly would be faster or produce better results. One senior leader observes that people within their agency sometimes use GenAI in the way they would use a search engine, applying it to questions that have a straightforward factual answer rather than to tasks where its generative capabilities offer real value.

*"What I have generally seen in how people use AI, and what bothers me, is that people use it like Google. For things where Google is actually better. And that is precisely when AI might hallucinate an answer from some outdated information." (SL/L)*

#### 4.2.5 Creative quality and authenticity

Views on how GenAI affects the quality of creative work are divided across the interviews. On one hand, GenAI has enabled work that would previously have been impossible or too expensive to produce. Several participants describe specific examples: a print-quality image produced without a photoshoot, a multilingual audio production delivered in hours when the traditional approach would have taken days, visual content created for a product that did not yet physically exist. In each case, GenAI extended what was achievable within real time and budget constraints. A creative director at a large agency describes one such situation in detail, where a print-quality image was needed under conditions that would have required an international shoot.

*"In the middle of Finland's harshest winter we needed a picture of a person with hair wet from rain. Making that image at that moment would have required us to get on a plane somewhere. We were now able to make it print-ready in two days."* (CD/XL)

On the other hand, participants note that the overall quality bar for content is shifting in both directions at once. A creative lead at a large agency describes how AI has raised the expectations for work that is genuinely human-made, precisely because so much can now be produced without it.

*"It has made some things easier and faster. At the same time it has raised the bar on the side where you are doing something real and authentic. What is the added value that justifies the highest production price? Secondary work phases can be outsourced to AI, but the level of expectation for the primary ones has risen at the same time."* (CL/L)

On the other hand, participants note that the overall quality bar for content is shifting in both directions at once. The bar for what can be produced cheaply is rising, which is raising client and audience expectations across the board. At the same time, the value placed on content that is visibly and authentically human-made is also rising, precisely because so much more can now be produced without that quality. A senior leader at a large agency connects this to a broader cultural shift, noting that human authorship is increasingly becoming a marker of premium value in creative work, with brands and

consumers beginning to treat it as something that requires active demonstration rather than being assumed.

*"It has set a new bar for what counts as creative anymore. This question enters the picture of whether something is human made. That is the luxury. Prada brought out a collection that was a kind of anti-AI fashion. People are wanting to prove that it is human-made." (SL/L)*

The risk of negative consumer reaction to AI-generated content is described as particularly acute when human figures are involved. When AI video featuring people is published on behalf of a brand, the reaction tends to be more negative and more visible than with other content types, and several agencies describe making deliberate choices to keep AI involvement invisible or to avoid it altogether in those contexts.

*"If there are human figures in it, you get that uncanny valley feeling. You really should not have used AI for that type of video at all." (SL/L)*

### **4.3 Organisational factors shaping GenAI acceptance and adoption**

The following sections examine the organisational-level factors that shape how GenAI is adopted and used within agencies. These include leadership and governance structures, data security practices, approaches to copyright and intellectual property, and the ways in which agencies support their staff in building AI capabilities.

#### **4.3.1 Leadership and governance**

The way agencies structure, support, and govern GenAI use differs substantially across the sample, and these differences shape what adoption looks like in practice. In larger agencies, adoption has been driven from senior leadership, with significant investment in dedicated resources including internal AI teams, tool environments giving staff access to multiple language models in one place, and structured programmes for sharing knowledge across the organisation. These agencies have defined which tools are approved for use, what data security standards apply, and how staff are expected to build

their AI capabilities over time. The result is a more uniform and confident level of use across the workforce, even if individual practitioners vary in how deeply they have integrated GenAI into their specific work.

Smaller agencies present a more founder-driven picture, where adoption has been pushed forward primarily by one or two individuals and where formal structures are still being built. Some staff have been self-directed in building their own competence, while others have received little formal support and describe feeling uncertain about where to start or what is expected of them.

However, even in well-resourced agencies, the pace of change is constrained by the human side of the process. The challenge is not installing the tools but changing the workflows around them, a point made by a senior leader at the largest agency in the sample.

*"The human is definitely the slowest component. Especially with us having an old firm and several hundred people all used to working in certain ways. You tear all the processes open and do things a new way, and that does not happen in a week."  
(SL/XL)*

In smaller agencies, governance is more founder-driven and less formalised. A practitioner in the smallest agency in the sample identifies the absence of a named person responsible for coordinating AI knowledge as the most important structural gap, noting that staff who work remotely can easily miss information that circulates organically in the office.

*"What you probably need is someone who has ownership of that matter, so that even if everyone is researching and sharing information, you get all that knowledge collected together. If there are people who are always remote, that one person or several people get left out of the conversation entirely."  
(DS/S)*

#### **4.3.2 Data security**

Data security is the most consistently named boundary condition on GenAI use across all four agencies. The concern that confidential client information could enter a public training dataset is taken seriously, and all agencies describe having some approach to

managing it. In larger organisations, this takes the form of enterprise-level agreements with tool providers that include terms preventing data from being used for training purposes.

*"Before we got those secure sandboxes in Gemini and ChatGPT where no information leaks out, naturally we could not put any client-specific information into them."  
(CL/L)*

In smaller agencies, the approach relies more on staff awareness and on using paid-tier subscriptions, which are understood to offer better protections than free versions. What is consistent across the sample is that data security considerations are the primary reason GenAI is not used in specific contexts, and that all agencies feel a responsibility to ensure their staff understands what can and cannot be shared with an AI tool. AI literacy, in the sense of knowing how these tools handle data, is described as a foundational requirement that cannot be assumed even among technically confident practitioners.

### **4.3.3 Copyright and intellectual property**

Copyright and intellectual property concerns are present across all four agencies, but are handled differently depending on size and resources. A clear dividing line in the data is between agencies that have made explicit decisions to use only tools for which they can verify the copyright status of the output, and those where this has not yet been formalised. In larger agencies, the choice of which image and video generation tools to use is explicitly linked to whether the provider offers commercial copyright assurance. Tools developed by providers that cannot offer this assurance are excluded from client work, regardless of their technical capability, because the agency needs to be able to guarantee to clients that the work does not carry legal risk.

*"What is important to us is that we can honestly tell the client that we can guarantee this material is copyright-safe. That is why we do not use those in client work."  
(CD/XL)*

In smaller agencies, copyright considerations are present but less formally governed, with individual practitioners making their own assessments on a case-by-case basis. For audio production, questions of consent when using voice cloning are treated as a matter of personal professional ethics, with practitioners describing a self-imposed standard of always obtaining and compensating the original speaker even where no organisational policy requires it.

#### **4.3.4 Training and knowledge sharing**

How well agencies support their staff in developing GenAI skills emerges as one of the clearest differences across the sample. In agencies where structured training and clear guidance exist, participants describe feeling more confident in their use of GenAI and less uncertain about what is expected of them. A creative lead at a mid-sized agency describes how the introduction of an internal certification programme had a settling effect on the team, providing a clear organisational signal about which tools to use and what baseline competence was expected.

*"We have now quite deliberately taken a fairly strong start on this. We have created our own internal AI certificate. By the end of April, everyone completes at least the basic level of the certificate." (CL/M)*

Where this support is absent or uneven, participants describe situations where knowledge accumulates unevenly: some individuals develop strong capabilities through self-directed exploration, while others remain at a basic level and feel excluded from conversations happening among their more experienced colleagues. Several participants in smaller agencies identify this as the single most important thing they would change about how GenAI is currently used in their organization, not the tools themselves, but the consistency and fairness of access to knowledge about how to use them well.

*"It is left too much to individual learning. Everyone should have the same tools for using AI. That would mean consistent capability and equal quality across everyone." (DS/S)*

## 4.4 Environmental factors shaping GenAI acceptance and adoption

The following sections examine the environmental factors that shape GenAI adoption, including client expectations and the competitive dynamics of the marketing agency market.

### 4.4.1 Client expectations

Client expectations act as both a push and a pull on GenAI adoption across the sample. On one side, clients increasingly expect agencies to show how they use AI, and some include questions about AI capability when selecting an agency. There is also a general expectation of faster delivery and greater cost efficiency, which creates pressure to use GenAI wherever it can help meet those demands. On the other side, some clients actively prohibit the use of AI tools in work produced on their behalf, citing data handling requirements or concerns about their brand being associated with AI-generated content. Others have specific data security requirements that effectively prevent the use of cloud-based generative models for their work. Managing these varying client positions requires ongoing communication, and several participants describe helping clients develop their own thinking about where AI use is appropriate and where it is not.

A central concern in the client relationship is the perception of who is responsible for the work. A senior leader at a large agency describes how the agency's credibility rests on the relationship between the client and the people doing the work, and how AI involvement risks undermining that trust if it becomes visible.

*"The client relationship is primarily always with the people. The client never sees what they have bought before it is done. The trust is in those people and those people are responsible for the content. You want to avoid the client having the feeling that AI made it." (SL/L)*

Several agencies describe helping clients develop their own thinking about where AI use is appropriate and where it is not, positioning the agency as a guide and partner. This advisory role is seen as a source of value that becomes more rather than less important as AI tools become more widely accessible.

*"We help our clients plan company- and brand-specific AI strategies when needed, meaning specifically to draw the lines around where AI can be used and where it cannot. But we are ourselves constantly in that process too." (CL/L)*

#### **4.4.2 Competitive pressure**

The competitive environment is described across the sample as a source of pressure to stay current with GenAI, though participants are careful to distinguish between adoption driven by genuine utility and adoption driven by fear of being left behind. The emergence of AI-focused new entrants to the market is noted as a point of competitive concern, particularly in larger agencies with established pricing models that are now under pressure. Several participants observe that agencies that can use GenAI to reduce the cost of production will have a structural advantage in price-sensitive client relationships, while those that cannot will find it increasingly difficult to compete.

*"A lot of small AI agencies have emerged, promising that everything is now done purely through AI and fully AI-driven processes. Plus we have international competitors coming to Finland with these international AI planning platforms. It is really pushing hard." (SL/XL)*

The stakes are described as existential by some participants. A senior leader at a small agency draws a direct parallel to the digital marketing transition at the turn of the millennium, while a video producer at a mid-sized agency frames it in equally harsh terms.

*"Those who are not in AI, who do not use the tools and opportunities AI brings, they will basically go bankrupt, they will drop out. That is just a fact." (SL/S)*

*"It will grow, and those who do not take it up at least halfway seriously, things will not go well for them. This is exactly the same kind of shift as digital marketing from websites at the turn of the millennium, and the old-school agencies that did not take that seriously disappeared pretty quickly." (VP/M)*

At the same time, several participants express the view that long-term competitive advantage will not come from using GenAI as such, since that will eventually become a standard baseline across the industry, but from combining AI capability with strategic and creative thinking that the tools themselves cannot replicate. The ability to articulate and charge for distinctly human expertise is seen as the key strategic question for the coming years.

*"The development is such that first it requires the field to become somewhat saturated with AI stuff. Then everyone is sick of AI stuff and then there is a service for how to make it more human. Like oh right, we have these marketing agencies that are professional people." (SL/L)*

## **5 Discussion**

The findings of this study address the main research question by showing that GenAI is accepted and used in content marketing production in ways that are shaped by the interaction of individual, organisational, and environmental factors. Across all four agencies, GenAI is embedded most consistently in text-based tasks and early-stage visual concept work, while video tools remain more cautiously adopted. Acceptance is strongest where perceived usefulness is clearest, particularly in roles where GenAI demonstrably reduces time pressure or expands what is practically achievable. The three sub-questions are addressed in turn through the theoretical discussion that follows, which examines individual-level perceptions, organisational conditions, and environmental pressures as distinct but interconnected dimensions of GenAI acceptance and adoption.

### **5.1 Theoretical implications**

The following sections discuss the theoretical implications of the findings at each of the three levels of analysis used in this study. The discussion moves from individual-level factors, where TAM provides the primary analytical lens, through organisational-level factors, where governance and infrastructure shape what individual acceptance looks like in practice, to environmental factors, where competitive pressure and client expectations determine not only the pace of adoption but its direction.

#### **5.1.1 Individual-level factors**

The findings of this study broadly confirm the relevance of TAM as a theoretical lens for understanding GenAI adoption in marketing agencies. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are both present as adoption drivers across the sample, consistent with the foundational propositions of TAM and subsequently validated across a wide range of professional and technological contexts (Marangunić & Granić, 2014; Chuttur,

2009). The study also supports more recent applications of TAM to AI-specific contexts, where perceived usefulness has been identified as particularly influential in performance-oriented professional settings (Ma et al., 2025; Yurder, 2025). In the agency context, this performance orientation is especially visible, as participants evaluate GenAI tools primarily in relation to their capacity to accelerate production, support creative ideation, and help meet client expectations under time pressure. This aligns closely with Wahid et al. (2025), who show how GenAI redistributes core content creation capabilities across a wider range of actors, challenging the traditional expertise advantage that marketing agencies have held and forcing them to redefine their value propositions.

At the same time, the findings reveal important limitations in what TAM is able to explain on its own. The most significant of these concerns the role of professional identity. Across the sample, creative practitioners describe a tension between recognising GenAI as useful and resisting its use because it feels inconsistent with how they understand their professional role. This pattern sits outside TAM's core constructs of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use and represents a meaningful extension of the framework in the context of creative professional work. For creative professionals, questions of authorship, craft, and professional identity influence how they relate to new tools in ways that TAM's performance-oriented constructs do not fully capture.

Mogaji et al. (2024), writing in the context of hospitality and tourism, raise similar questions about the competence of TAM in the era of generative AI, arguing that the model's individual-centric perspective and limited scope may be insufficient to capture the full complexity of technology acceptance in industries where professional norms and identity are strongly embedded. The findings of this study provide empirical support for this critique in a different industry context, showing that for creative professionals in marketing agencies, the question of whether to use GenAI is not only about performance and usability but also about authorship, craft, and how people see their own professional role.

The individual-level findings also raise questions about the relationship between perceived usefulness and actual productivity gains. Participants widely report clear time savings from GenAI use, consistent with the performance outcomes that TAM predicts. However, as one participant observes, company-level productivity figures have not grown proportionately, suggesting that freed capacity tends to be absorbed by other activities rather than producing a direct increase in output. This finding adds nuance to the usefulness narrative in prior research, including Ma et al. (2025) and Khan and Hasan Emon (2024), by pointing to a gap between individually perceived usefulness and productivity at the organisational level. Making full use of GenAI's potential appears to require deliberate management of how freed time is used, rather than assuming that doing individual tasks faster automatically leads to more being done overall.

The findings on perceived ease of use also add to the existing literature. Prior research suggests that ease of use may be secondary to perceived usefulness when professionals expect significant performance gains (Chuttur, 2009; Marangunić & Granić, 2014), and the findings support this for language models, which participants across roles describe as easy to pick up and quick to integrate into their daily work. However, the picture is more varied for visual and video tools. Tools that are difficult to use or produce unpredictable results are consistently associated with lower adoption rates, even among practitioners who are motivated to use them. This suggests that how much ease of use matters relative to perceived usefulness may depend not only on the individual's role, as prior literature suggests, but also on the type of content and the specific tool. Future research applying TAM in creative professional contexts should take this variability into account.

### **5.1.2 Organisational-level factors**

At the organisational level, the findings confirm the relationship between how an agency is structured and how confidently its staff uses GenAI, a relationship that TAM identifies

but does not develop in detail. In agencies with clear governance, approved tools, and structured knowledge sharing, practitioners report higher confidence and lower uncertainty. In agencies where these structures are absent, individual practice is more varied, and staff members describe feeling unsure about what is expected of them. The findings show how specific governance mechanisms, such as tool approval processes, data security agreements, and internal certification programmes, turn organisational intention into real individual capability. Khan and Hasan Emon (2024) similarly identify facilitating conditions as a significant positive influence on perceived usefulness and adoption intention, reinforcing the importance of organisational infrastructure in enabling individual-level acceptance.

Rai (2025), in a qualitative study of AI adoption barriers among UK SMEs, identifies lack of knowledge and understanding as one of the three primary barriers to AI adoption in smaller organisations, alongside distrust and governance gaps. This resonates closely with the findings here, where uneven AI literacy and the absence of structured knowledge sharing are identified as the most significant constraints on consistent adoption in smaller agencies. Rai (2025) further highlights that knowledge transfer and training are central to overcoming these barriers, which in the agency context means that structured internal learning programmes and clear governance are more effective than leaving individuals to figure things out on their own.

The copyright and data security findings introduce a dimension that is not well covered in the TAM literature but turns out to be significant in practice. Agencies make explicit decisions about which tools to use based on what copyright assurance and data protection terms the provider offers, and these decisions directly shape what individual practitioners are able to do in client work. The practical implication is that legal and data security boundaries around tool use are just as important as the technical quality of the tools themselves when it comes to whether and how GenAI is adopted in professional service contexts.

### 5.1.3 Environmental factors

At the environmental level, the findings show that competitive pressure and client expectations do not simply speed up adoption or slow it down but actively shape which uses of GenAI are prioritised and why. Agencies are adopting GenAI primarily to stay price-competitive and meet client expectations around speed and efficiency, rather than primarily to improve creative quality. This creates a tension in which the same tools that make production faster also lower the perceived value of that production, a dynamic that Wahid et al. (2025) describe at a field level as the redistribution of content creation capabilities eroding the traditional expertise advantage of marketing agencies. The findings here show how individual practitioners and agency leaders are navigating this tension in day-to-day practice.

Several participants express the view that long-term competitive advantage will come not from using GenAI as such but from combining AI capability with the kind of strategic and creative thinking that the tools cannot replicate. This connects to the argument made by Huang and Rust (2021), who propose that as AI takes on more routine and analytical tasks, the comparative strength of human professionals shifts toward the judgment-intensive and relational parts of the work that AI cannot easily do. The findings in this study reflect this dynamic in the specific context of content marketing agencies, where the key question participants are asking is how to communicate and charge for the human expertise that remains valuable once AI has handled the more routine parts of production.

The universal norm of human oversight across all four agencies, regardless of size or governance maturity, is a finding that deserves specific attention. In TAM terms, it functions as a shared behavioural norm that supports adoption intention by framing GenAI as a tool that extends professional responsibility rather than replacing it. This is consistent with the argument in Mogaji et al. (2024) that acceptance of AI tools in

professional settings is partly dependent on practitioners feeling that they retain authorship and control over the final output. It also reflects a broader pattern in the literature on AI in professional work, where human oversight is identified not only as an ethical requirement but as a practical condition for the legitimate use of AI in client-facing contexts (Kshetri, 2024).

## **5.2 Managerial implications**

The findings carry several practical implications for marketing agencies seeking to develop their GenAI capabilities sustainably and effectively. These are organised around the same three levels as the findings and the theoretical framework.

### **5.2.1 Individual-level implications**

At the individual level, the most important implication concerns how agencies introduce GenAI to their staff. The findings suggest that onboarding should go beyond technical training to include a conversation about how GenAI relates to professional identity and creative responsibility. Framing GenAI as something that supports and speeds up expert judgement, rather than something that replaces it, is more likely to lead to sustained adoption among creative professionals. This is particularly important for practitioners in visual and design roles, where professional identity is most closely tied to the act of making and where resistance to GenAI tends to be strongest. Agencies that treat these concerns as irrational resistance are likely to find that resistance continues, but those that address it directly and present AI assistance as a legitimate part of professional practice are more likely to build real capability across their teams.

The findings also point to the importance of paying attention to how easy different tools are to use. Language models are straightforward to learn and fit easily into existing workflows. Visual and video tools require more deliberate support, including clear guidance

on which tools are approved, what their limitations are, and how staff can build confidence without feeling overwhelmed by how fast the tool landscape is changing. Agencies that have standardised around a set of approved tools and built shared practice on that foundation report that this has a noticeably settling effect on staff confidence and reduces the feeling that people need to keep starting from scratch with new platforms.

### **5.2.2 Organisational-level implications**

At the organisational level, the most important implication is that having clear governance in place is not an administrative burden but a practical driver of adoption. Agencies that have made clear decisions about which tools to use, under what data security conditions, and for what purposes report more confident and consistent use among staff. For smaller agencies that cannot build dedicated AI teams, the minimum that seems to make a real difference is having a named person responsible for tracking developments, a clear set of approved tools, and a regular way of sharing what people are learning across the team. Several participants identify the absence of exactly this structure as the single most important thing they would change about how their agency currently operates.

Data security and copyright awareness need to be treated as basic requirements rather than specialist knowledge. Staff should understand what can and cannot be shared with an AI tool, and what the copyright implications of AI-generated content are, before they run into these questions in a real client project. The risk of accidentally putting confidential client information into a public training model, or of using AI-generated images that carry unresolved copyright issues, is present in agencies of all sizes. Clear communication of these boundaries, combined with access to tools that meet solid data security and copyright standards, is the minimum that needs to be in place.

### **5.2.3 Environmental-level implications**

At the environmental level, the findings suggest that agencies need to develop a clear and honest position on GenAI in their client relationships. The data shows that clients vary widely in what they expect and what they will allow regarding AI use, and managing this variation requires ongoing conversation rather than a single policy statement. Agencies that actively help clients think through where AI use makes sense and where it does not are better placed than those that either hide their AI use or apply it without thinking. The advisory role that some agencies are starting to take on, helping clients build their own AI policies and strategies, is a source of value that becomes more rather than less important as AI tools become easier to access.

The competitive pressure findings also suggest that agencies should be clear about the difference between competing on price in the short term and building a stronger position over the longer term. The agencies that are best placed for the coming years are not those using GenAI primarily to cut costs, but those using it to free up human capacity for the strategic and creative work that AI cannot do. Making this case clearly, to staff as well as to clients, is one of the most important things agency leaders can do right now.

### **5.3 Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations that should be kept in mind when reading the findings. The most significant is the scope of the sample. The study covers four Finnish marketing agencies working in content marketing production, and the findings cannot be applied more broadly to agencies in other countries, other marketing disciplines, or other sectors. Finland is a relatively small and technologically active market, and the adoption patterns described here may not reflect what is happening in markets with different regulatory environments, different workforce conditions, or different levels of digital maturity. Research comparing multiple national contexts would be needed to test how widely the findings apply.

The sample is also limited in size. Eight interviews across four agencies give a rich qualitative picture, but they are not enough to say that all relevant perspectives within the Finnish marketing agency context have been covered. The study should be read as a contribution to a growing area of research rather than as a complete account of GenAI adoption in marketing agencies.

A further limitation is how quickly the field is changing. GenAI capabilities and agency practices are moving fast, and the findings reflect the situation as of early 2026. Several participants note that the tools and ways of working described in the interviews will likely look different within months. The broader structural findings, particularly around professional identity, organisational governance, and the tension between efficiency and authenticity, are likely to hold up better over time, but research that follows agencies over a longer period would be needed to track how these dynamics develop as the technology becomes more established and industry norms settle.

The study also relies entirely on what participants said in interviews. Participants may describe their AI use in ways that reflect what is expected of them in their organisation rather than what they actually do day to day. This is a common challenge in qualitative interview research, but it is particularly relevant here given how much professional identity is tied up in how people talk about AI. Methods that observe practice directly, such as following practitioners through real project workflows, would provide a useful additional perspective that interview data alone cannot capture.

Despite these limitations, the study makes a number of contributions to the existing literature. It provides qualitative, agency-specific evidence from a context that is underrepresented in the largely quantitative and survey-based TAM literature. It identifies professional identity as a significant factor in GenAI acceptance among creative professionals, which extends the TAM framework in a way that prior research has called for but not yet demonstrated in this specific context. And it shows how individual, organisational,

and environmental factors interact in practice, adding detail to a theoretical relationship that existing models point to but do not develop.

The professional identity findings point to a productive area for future research. How creative professionals adapt their sense of professional identity as AI becomes more embedded in their work is a question that research following individuals over time is better placed to answer than a study that captures a single point in time. Tracking how people's relationship with GenAI tools changes as both their own skills and the tools themselves develop would generate insights that a one-off interview study cannot. There is also a need for research across different creative industries, such as journalism, graphic design, and film production, to test whether the professional identity patterns found here are specific to content marketing agencies or apply more widely.

Finally, the governance and infrastructure findings point toward a productive area for organisational research. The study shows that clear governance, standardised tools, and structured knowledge sharing help individuals feel more confident using GenAI, but it does not explore how these conditions get built in the first place. Research into how agencies of different sizes develop their AI governance capacity, and which leadership approaches and internal processes are most effective in doing so, would be useful for both researchers and practitioners.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview guide

#### A) Intro and context

1. To start, how long have you worked at this agency? How long have you worked as a marketing professional within this industry, in marketing agencies?
2. Please describe your current role, responsibilities and what your work typically includes.
3. How does a typical workday look like for you? Please describe in detail.
4. What do you like the most about your work as a marketing professional? Can you give me three aspects?
5. What are the not so nice sides to working as a marketing professional? Can you give three aspects?

#### B) Content marketing, content marketing production and AI

6. What is content marketing in your own words?
7. What kind of work tasks, processes and deliverables does content marketing production embrace?
8. Can you give some examples of content marketing production where you have been involved? What did you do?
9. What types of content marketing work does your agency mainly deliver? (For example, content strategy, copy, visual design, campaigns, social media, video)
10. Which GenAI tools currently used in your work or your team's work and how?
11. In what ways are GenAI tools used in creative work among marketing professionals in general?
12. If you look back, how has GenAI changed creative work in general and content production in particular?
13. Can you walk me through one recent example where GenAI was used from start to finish? Or if not recent, just an example, and if not from start to finish, just anywhere along the process.

14. Where is GenAI not used and why? Give examples and details.

**C) Perceived usefulness**

15. Overall, has GenAI been useful in your agency work so far? In what ways? Please give examples.
16. How, if at all, has GenAI changed outcomes that matter in agency work? What do you mean by outcome here? Give examples and be more specific.
17. Have there been cases where GenAI did not add value or even made things harder? Please give examples of such situations.

**D) Perceived ease of use and workflow fit**

18. How easy or difficult has it been to integrate GenAI into real project workflows in content marketing production? Please explain in what way these factors make GenAI easier or more difficult to use.
19. What makes a GenAI tool stay in use in your everyday work instead of remaining something that is only occasionally experimented with?

**E) Factors influencing acceptance and adoption**

20. What factors have most influenced whether people in your agency use GenAI in content production or avoid using it? Please give examples.
21. How do client expectations shape the use or non-use of GenAI in content production?
22. What kinds of risks or concerns come up most often when using GenAI in content marketing production? Please give examples from content production situations.
23. How do external or environmental factors influence the use of GenAI in your agency's content production? In what ways do these factors encourage or limit the use of GenAI?

**F) Leadership, norms, and governance**

24. What guidance, policies or informal rules exist in your agency regarding the use of GenAI in content production?

*For participants in leadership roles:*

25. Who decides which tools can be used or how they should be used?
26. How were these practices or policies introduced?
27. It has been argued that GenAI can speed up marketing content production. What is your view on this?

*For participants in creative roles:*

25. Do you feel you have clarity on when it is appropriate to use GenAI and when it is not?
26. What kind of support from the agency would make GenAI easier or safer to use in your work?
27. What does creative responsibility mean in your own words? How do you view the relationship between GenAI and creative responsibility in the context of creative content marketing production?
28. What does quality ownership mean in your own words? How do you view the relationship between GenAI and quality ownership in the context of creative content marketing production?

### **G) Close and practical takeaways**

29. If you could change one thing about how GenAI is currently used in your agency, what would it be?
30. What do you think GenAI use in agencies will look like 12 months from now?
31. Is there anything important we have not covered that you think matters for GenAI acceptance in agency creative work?
32. Is there anything else you would like to add?