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## **Marketing and Retail Track**

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### **CONCEPTUALISING THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF GENERATIVE AI ON THE HUMANISATION OF BRAND CREATIVE NARRATIVE PRACTICES**

#### **Abstract**

This paper explores the emerging and inherent tensions that exist in integrating generative artificial intelligence (GAI), creative narrative routines and practices (branded storytelling) and the humanisation of brand communications. By integrating across multiple theoretical perspectives, the paper offers conceptualisation that provide novel syntheses and typologies as emergent propositions that enable a better understanding of how GAI is impacting on brand creative narrative routines and practices. We explore the impact of GAI on sentient creative narrative practices and deconstruct the technology-human interaction at play in the humanisation of brand creative narratives. The paper argues that achieving the delicate balance between data-driven precision and emotional authenticity becomes imperative for brands aiming to establish deep connections with their audience. The paper offers conceptual contributions for how digital marketing agencies and GAI adopting marketing teams can improvise innovation by re-defining creative narrative dynamic capabilities for evolutionary fitness and sustained advantage of the firm.

## Introduction

### **An overview of generative AI technologies and their application within branded story telling in digital marketing agencies.**

Generative AI technologies have unleashed significant digital transformation within marketing services firms. Collectively these suites of technologies are providing new levels of unparalleled capabilities within marketing firm practices such as content creation, creativity, and innovation (Kshetri et al. 2023; Rane, 2023). Given the speed, scale, and complexity of change that this disruptive technology has engendered, organisational sense making, no less one within the marketing function is required.

Generative AI is defined as applications created with foundation models. These models include large artificial neural networks inspired by the billions of neurons connected in the real brain. Foundation models are part of what is known as deep learning, a term that refers to the numerous deep layers found in neural networks. Many recent developments in AI have been powered by deep learning, but the foundation models that support generative AI applications represent a significant shift within deep learning. Unlike prior deep learning models, they can handle incredibly huge and diverse collections of unstructured data while performing several tasks (Mckinsey, 2023).

Foundation models have enabled new capabilities while substantially improving current ones across a wide range of modalities, such as pictures, video, audio, and computer code. These technologies, which include powerful algorithms and advanced machine learning models, like GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) and DALL-E, are revolutionising the creation of new branded communication material across a variety of media formats, including text, audio, images, and synthetic data. (Feuerriegel et al. 2024). Their relevance to the repertoire of digital agencies is now adjudged as being transformative, driven largely by their potential to create material that is indistinguishable from that made by humans. While these models are trained on large datasets, that allow them to produce imaginative and sometimes lifelike results, they are however resource-intensive, require significant computing power and data, all of which have historically limited their development to only well-funded organisations. (Kanbach et al. 2023)

Consequently, marketing services firms and more specifically digital marketing agencies are faced with the pressure of finding ways to adopt these technologies as a way of ensuring that they are maintaining organisational evolutionary fitness, defined as the ability of an organisation to adapt, survive, and thrive in a changing environment. It involves the organization's capacity to evolve, innovate, and align its strategies, structures, and practices with external demands and internal capabilities, and competitiveness within this radically changing technological landscape (March, 1991; Teece et al. 1997; Aldrich, 1999). Indeed, for digital agencies, the ramifications of Generative AI (GAI) are enormous. These technologies automate and enhance content creation, from writing marketing copy to generating graphic assets, increasing efficiency and productivity. Generative AI (GAI) capacity includes predictive analytics and website design, where AI can analyse user data to optimize user experiences and conversion paths. Furthermore, GAI can personalise information at scale and adapt communications to individual interests and behaviour, all which is critical for engaging today's consumers (Kshetri et al. 2023).

A recent practitioner survey suggests that three out of every four marketers either currently utilise some degree of GAI within their tasks and routines or are considering its use. (Econsultancy, 2023) Despite its potential, GAI is still faced with challenges such as accuracy, prejudice, and ethical considerations. Though celebrated for the speed, scale, and efficiency that they deliver to creative workflows, the literature suggests that not much has been done to date in evaluating the potential downsides such as the technology-human agency clash within otherwise sentient practices found within the creative narrative processes of GAI adopting agencies. What might this mean for the various areas of branded creative communications practices? This paper argues that the successful deployment of GAI demands such careful evaluation of its limitations and other absorptive capacity consequences (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). As a result, as digital agencies and other practice groups, industries and firms continue to rapidly adopt these systems, it becomes pertinent to better understand the how, why, and what is involved in this adoption process. Furthermore, the ability to conceptualise the ongoing institutionalisation of these new technologies and their potential impact on firm behaviour provides important domain knowledge that may also be expanded upon through future research.

The paper is organised as follows: The next section provides a brief background to the study through an exploration of pertinent literature and lack thereof. The broad set of research questions are outlined and an overview of the conceptual organising principles guiding the study given. This is followed by a section that discusses the methodology, more specifically an explication of the theories, concepts and perspectives utilised for the conceptual analysis. The next section provides a detailed discussion and implications of the conceptualisation. The final section is the conclusion and limitations of the study.

## **Background**

The aim of this study is to provide a level of conceptual analysis, synthesise, and potential typologies as emergent conceptual frameworks that will enable a better understanding of the impact of GAI adoption on the creative narrative practices within GAI adopting digital agencies and firms. The authors see value and potential contribution in helping researchers and practitioners alike better understand the tensions around the evolving constitutive rules, routines, and dynamic capabilities that creative and innovation driven firms such as might be exemplified by digital marketing agencies must be attuned to as they continue the adoption of these suite of technologies. In this way they can potentially protect their evolutionary fitness, and key firm assets such as sentient creative routines, as they go about incorporating generative AI technologies into their practices. They can also further and better improve their innovation within their brand creative narrative routines and practices.

As a conceptual paper, the study is positioned within ongoing conversations in three theoretical domains, namely, brand creative narratives, otherwise also referred to as brand storytelling; generative artificial intelligence as a technology and its interaction with human agency in the performance of sentient branded communication practices; and finally the institutionalisation of technology enabled practices and capabilities within the firm, and its impact on firm fitness and long term advantage. Table 1.0 below provides a detailed overview of the research purpose.

The inquiry into these three theoretical domains is underpinned by a rigorous exploration of a range of constructs and theories that guide the analysis and discussions within the study.

**Table 1.0 The conceptual research purpose**

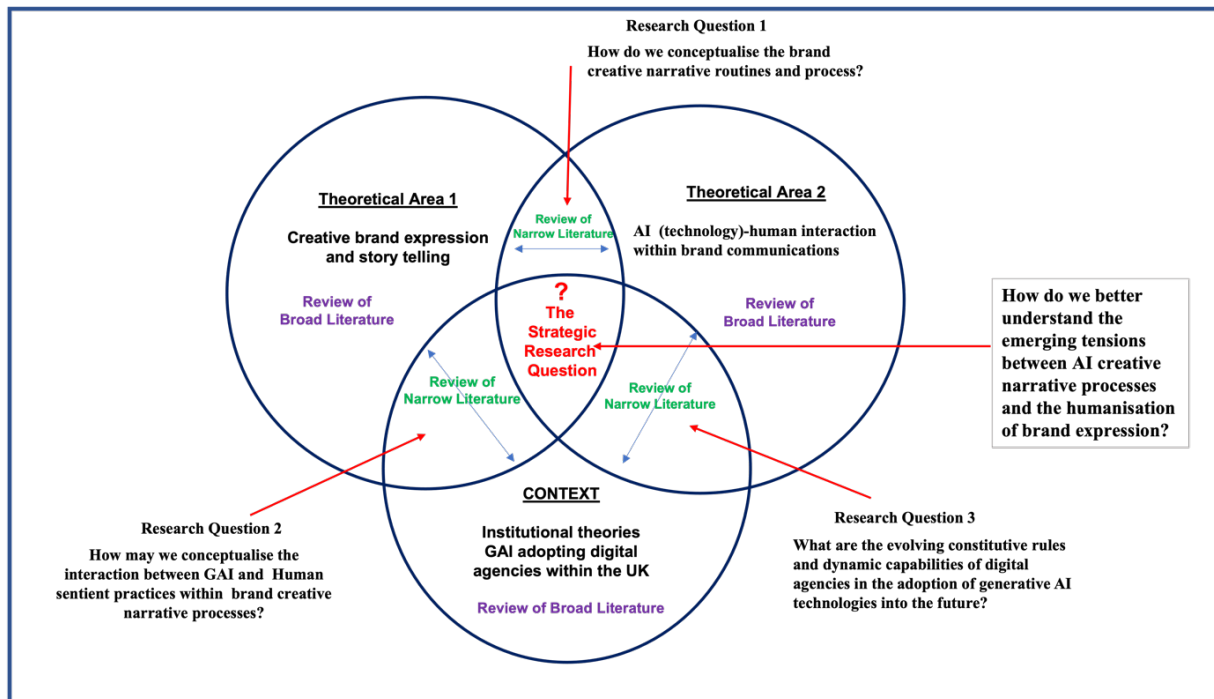
Research Focal Area/Title			
Conceptualising the transformative impact of Generative AI on the humanisation of brand creative narrative practices.			
Strategic Research Question (The Big Question)	How do we better understand the emerging tensions between AI creative narrative processes and the humanisation of brand expression		
Theoretical Research Areas (Core theoretical domains)	<u>Theoretical Area 1</u> Creative brand expression and sentient storytelling	<u>Theoretical Area 2</u> AI (technology)-human interaction within brand communications	<u>Context/ Theoretical Area 3</u> GAI adopting digital agencies within the UK
Theoretical Underpinning (Scaffolding or methods theories)	<u>Underpinning Theories</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story telling/narrative processing theory</li> <li>• Hierarchy of effects theory</li> <li>• Human Engagement</li> <li>• Brand Immersion</li> </ul>	<u>Underpinning Theories</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Interaction model theory</li> <li>• Human centred brand Communication</li> </ul>	<u>Underpinning Theories</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capabilities and competencies</li> <li>• Constitutive rules</li> <li>• Foundational Routines</li> </ul>
Research Questions	<u>Research Question 1</u> How do we conceptualise the brand creative narrative routines and process?	<u>Research Question 2</u> How may we conceptualise the interaction between GAI and Human sentient practices within brand creative narrative processes?	<u>Research Question 3</u> What are the evolving constitutive rules and dynamic capabilities of digital agencies in the adoption of generative AI technologies into the future?
Research Aims [Contribution] (What would finding answers to the research questions help accomplish)	<u>Research Aim 1</u> An adapted conceptual framework for brand Creative Narrative process	<u>Research Aim 2</u> A summarization/typology of key human centred engagement and ethical constructs in the adoption of GAI practices within creative narrative routines	<u>Research Aim 3</u> An emergent model for the impact of GAI adoption on the foundational routines, capabilities and creative narrative practices of GAI adopting digital agencies
Research Method (Conceptual Approach)	Conceptual Synthesis Conceptual integration across multiple theoretical perspectives	Conceptual Typology Categorising conceptual constructs into distinct types	Conceptual Synthesis Conceptual integration across multiple theoretical perspectives

The study explores and integrates pertinent constructs and theories ranging from narrative processing to the hierarchy of communications effects, as well as brand essence and equity, with natural interaction models and cognitive institutional approaches such as constitutive rules as well as routines and dynamic capabilities. By integrating across this range of diverse theories, the study seeks to scaffold higher order conceptualisations that address three research questions:

1. How do we conceptualise the evolving brand creative narrative routines and process?
2. How do we conceptualise the interaction between generative AI (technology) and human sentient practices within brand creative narrative processes?
3. What are the evolving constitutive rules, routines, and dynamic capabilities of digital marketing agencies as they incorporate generative AI technologies into their practices?

Figure 1.0 provides a further overview of the conceptual framework guiding the research. It shows the intersections that guide the integration of the various theories and how the potential gaps within the discourse are filled to answer the study’s strategic question.

**Figure 1.0 The Research Organising Conceptual Framework**



## Methodology

This inquiry joins the on-going call for conceptual research that helps bridge existing theories in interesting ways that link work across disciplines and multi-level insights while also broadening the scope of thinking (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, P.128; Jaakkola, 2020). The authors’ arguments are not derived from data in the traditional sense but involve the assimilation and combination of evidence in the form of previously developed concepts and theories (Hirschheim, 2008). Being a piece of conceptual research, the study is guided by two research approaches, namely, conceptual synthesis and typologies respectively.

Conceptual synthesis provides a high-level integration across multiple theories and streams of literature. (MacInnis, 2011). It represents a way of theorising that utilises narrative reasoning and seeks to unveil “big picture” patterns and connections rather than specific causal mechanisms (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013; Jaakkola, 2020).

Conceptual typologies seek to categorise conceptual variants into distinct types. By distinguishing, adding dimensional qualities or categorising extant knowledge of the phenomenon, construct, or theory in question (MacInnis, 2011), typologies reduce the complexity found within the domain (Fiss, 2011). They also offer a categorising feature that adds useful multidimensionality to phenomenon, that can later serve as coordinates for empirical studies.

Jointly, these research approaches demonstrate the study’s commitment to theorising based on conceptual rigour that delivers on three distinct research contributions:

1. An adapted conceptual framework for brand creative narrative process, and one that is sensitive to the inherent tensions of sentience and human agency within the artistic process and routines found within creative narrative capabilities.
2. A deconstruction and typology of sentient like GAI-Branding Interactions
3. An emergent module that conceptualises the impact of generative AI adoption on the routines and dynamic capabilities of AI adopting digital marketing agencies.

The methodological considerations that guide the study provide the intended level of conceptual rigour that support the discussion and implications. The logic, underlying theoretical sources selected as well as analytical approaches taken to derive the syntheses and deconstructions, in response to each research quest is further expatiated upon in the next section.

## **Discussions and Implications**

### **Research Question 1**

*How do we conceptualise the place of sentience and human agency within brand creative narrative routines?*

We propose that brand narratives are situated at the intersection of sentience, imagination, and rhetoric which we see as a set of distinctly human characteristics and capabilities that enable a marketing professional to think and act in original and creative ways and to ‘do otherwise’ in line with Giddens (1986) definition of agency. We further suggest that these characteristics and capabilities undergird the marketing activities of producing creative, relevant, salient, persuasive, and engaging brand stories. What follows is a mapping of the territory and attempt to sketch out a theoretical landscape of Creative Narrative Processing, the foundational routines of which are, storytelling, sentience, imagination, rhetoric, persuasion, human engagement, and brand immersion.

### **Storytelling**

Mills & John (2021) explain that ‘Storytelling is essential to successful branding’ (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010, p. 21) noting stories add symbolic value to products and differentiate brands by adding emotional components (Lundqvist et al. 2013). People by nature think in story-like ways (Abbott, 2002).’ For Mills and John, a brand story consists of Plot (story sequence), Character (persona and personality) and Purpose (authenticity and emotion) all of which play a part in producing an intended and a realised brand image respectively (Mills & John, 2021:11).

Narrative Processing Theory explains how consumers create process maps for all incoming stories and form a so-called Self Brand Connection (Schank, 1995) which plays a role in consumers construction of their sense of self and the identity they project to others expressed in their brands choices (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Stories are processed in relation to temporality (the story occurs over time in stages and episodes) characterisation (the agents in the story are identified by their roles and relationships) and causality.

Mills and John (2021) contend:

‘Storytelling deserves a more prominent place in the brand management literature... storytelling has been scarcely discussed in the brand management literature (Lundqvist et al. 2013, p. 292; see also: Aaker, 2018; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2013).

## **Sentience**

Sentience refers to the nature of human subjectivity involving self-awareness, sentiment, emotion, and the ability to make moral judgements. These topics are considered across a vast area of literature embracing biological, technological, and dense ethical studies into animal sentience, robotics, and artificial intelligence. (Brown, 2014, Gilbert & Martin, 2022).

Browning & Birch (2020) define sentience broadly as, ‘the capacity for any type of subjective experience’ and narrowly as ‘experiences that feel bad or feel good - such as pain, pleasure, anxiety, distress, boredom, hunger, thirst, pleasure, warmth, joy, comfort and excitement’ (DeGrazia, 1996; Duncan, 2006; Jones, 2013).’

The notion of sentience seems to be fundamental to brand narrative routines and the creation of brand stories that are necessarily grounded in a deep understanding of the lived experience of consumers. Stories tap into consumer joys and pains, feelings and aspirations that can be re-expressed as a provocation, something that is judged as consumer insight that is necessary to know by the brand owner (Smith, 2022)

Despite the claims of technological evangelists that artificial sentience is feasible and highly likely, we are left with addressing whether AI can ever suffer like human beings (Bentham, 1789; Singer, 1979) and whether two further aspects of human subjectivity, thought and communication can ever be indistinguishable from artificial intelligence. These aspects are Imagination and Rhetoric.

## **Imagination**

We propose that, ‘the imagination’ is a uniquely human faculty of mind. Scholarly interest in Imagination is longstanding. It has been studied since the ancient Greeks (cf Plato Dialogues) and considered across the classics, and organisational management (see for example Hamel & Prahalad, 1991; Schau, 2000; Errevelles, Horton & Fukawa, 2007). Imagination is portrayed as being an aspect of entrepreneurial ability, meaning making, creativity and innovation, and future shaping of the real world in the pursuit of competitive differentiation. Levitt (1983) asserts that, ‘The marketing imagination is the starting point of success in marketing’ and that the idea of differentiation was an ‘imaginative response’ to customer needs by giving them a compelling reason to buy.

Imagination is deemed to be a vital pre-cursor to action whereby ‘the idea precedes the deed’ (Levitt, 1983) a claim endorsed by Komporozos-Athanasίου & Fotaki (2015:1) who state that ‘imagination is “where it all begins.”

The significance of imagination in the context of brand narrative routines lies in the capability of our imagination to avoid juvenile connotations, such as idle daydreaming, idyllic fantasy,

hallucinations, childishness, deception, triviality and lacking any basis in science. (Brann, 1990). Imagination has the serious purpose to consider things in their absence, and to create sensible mental pictures of things that are not present from the past or are yet to be experienced. Brand stories thus create images in the mind and construct realities. We suggest therefore that brand stories use imagination in a way that Brann (1990) describes as a ‘world shaping power.’

We suggest that imagination is central to the creative authoring of brand stories. Consequently, if the role of creative brand stories is to engage the consumer by creating a compelling and meaningful narrative, then, for that narrative to effect consumer attitudes and behaviours it must be persuasive. From that perspective, brand stories must therefore also be grounded in a second aspect of human creative capability; rhetorical communication.

## **Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is the art of persuasive communication consisting of three elements. Logical and factual claims grounded in objectivity, emotional appeals grounded in subjective responses, and the ethical standing of the speaker. (Aristotle, 2004). A useful definition of rhetoric is “the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience” (Corbett & Connors, 1999).

We propose that rhetoric plays a crucial role in the construction of brand narratives which are designed to persuade customers and potential customers alike of brand benefits and what a brand stands for. Contemporary consideration of rhetoric in a marketing context has been offered by scholars such as Urde (2016) and Miles (2018). Miles cites Tonks (2002:806) calling for rhetoric to have a “central location in making sense of marketing management” who along with scholars such as ‘O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy (2004) contend that persuasion is a framing concept for marketing, stating that “in persuasion, everything depends on how things are put, that is on rhetoric.”

## **Human Engagement**

The aim of a brand narrative is to get the consumer to act. Standing out in a competitive landscape and getting customers to pay attention to brands and marketing messages is a central concern in marketing management (cf Levitt, 1980). Salience is associated with the ability of something to ‘stand out’ from its environment or background’ (Guido, 1998 cited in Sharp & Romaniuk, 2004). Salience is about achieving distinctiveness and is synonymous with attention getting, the first step in the AIDA model (E. St Elmo, 1908).

The AIDA model offers a useful conceptualisation for understanding how the brand engages with the human consumer. Through a hierarchy of effects process, the brand communicates and engages with the consumer across a sequence of steps: awareness, interest, decision and finally action.

Awareness depends on getting attention, which is central to dual information process theories, in particular the elaboration likelihood theory of Petty and Cacioppo (1981) attention induces a person to switch from an ambivalent mindset to an attentive mindset. Crucially however the transition from attention to interest and action depends on if the story is relevant to a person’s ‘matter at hand’ (Schiller, 2012; Aaker ,1996; Sperber & Wilson, 2012)

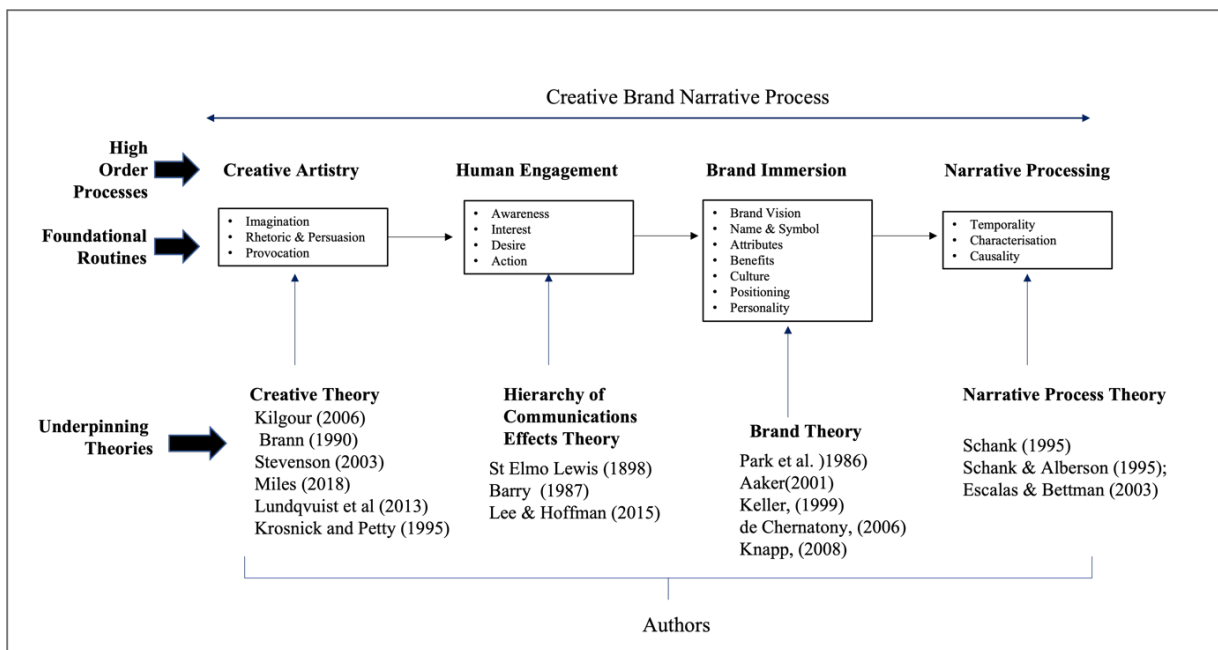


The ability to generate attention and connect with an audience links to emotional communication (see above in relation to Rhetoric). Thus, emotional, or vivid appeals not only get attention they generate emotional connection (see for example Edell & Burke, 1987) Indeed "the incidents that attract our attention are often those associated with strong sentiments," (Krosnick & Petty, 1995)

## Brand Immersion

The essential nature of the brand is the raw material of the brand narrative. Ogilvy (1983) states that the essential nature involves the task of identifying and promoting a brand’s “big idea”. Urde (2018) refers to this as the brand core. More commonly, brand essence a term originated by Ted Bates (1970) is used. Urde (2018) cites the use of similarly related terms such as “brand concept” (Park et al. 1986); “brand mantra” (Keller, 1999); “brand equity” (Aaker, 1996) “brand vision” (de Chernatony, 2006); the “promise” (Knapp, 2008); “covenant” (Balmer, 2010); and the brand’s “core ideology” (Collins and Porras, 1994). The essential characteristics of brand vision/objectives, name/symbol, attributes, benefits, culture, positioning, personality, and value proposition are central to the brand narrative.

**Figure 2 Conceptualising the Creative Brand Narrative Process**



We propose that the landscape of creative narrative processing is a distinctly human endeavour involving emotion and moral judgements grounded in subjective insight into the lived experience of human beings. In Figure 1.0 above, we indicate the aspects of creative narrative processing discussed, framing them as pre-cursors to brand narrative development. We further suggest that brand narratives authentically engage and resonate with lives of consumers when they are imbued with sentient properties which have historically been the subjective capabilities of imagination and rhetoric. This is not to deny that generative artificial intelligence can play a part in elaborating brand stories once the purpose and the structure of the story has been conceived, the question would be how, and at what cost.

Our discussion now turns to examining the interaction between GAI (technology) and human sentient practices outlined in part 1

## **Research Question 2**

***How do we conceptualise the interaction between GAI (technology) and Human sentient practices within brand creative narrative processes?***

### **Customer-Brand Relationship: A shifting paradigm**

In this section we pay attention to the literature on technology aided brand narrative processes and customer interactions. We argue that deconstructing the intricate interplay between technological enablement, particularly within sentient like AI, and the human-centred elements of brand marketing communication is essential for understanding as well as advancing the creation of significant consumer relationships within marketing.

The evolution of the customer-brand relationship is intricately linked to the integration of AI in marketing strategies in today's marketing landscape (Nguyen, Quach & Thaichon, 2022). While traditional approaches to branding emphasised emotional engagement and brand loyalty through storytelling and personalised experiences (Brakus et al. 2009; Schmitt et al. 2009; Pera and Viglia, 2016; Baker, 2016), the advent of AI introduces a new dimension to these practices as documented by various recent studies in the field (Cheng and Jiang, 2022; Libai et al. 2020; Yang and Hu, 2022; Aslam and Farhat, 2023). It is thus not surprising to observe other researchers claim that the customer-brand relationship is no longer solely reliant on static narratives but is starting to be dynamically shaped by AI-driven creative processes (Chen et al. 2019; Chaturvedi & Verma, 2023). Sentient-AI technologies now have the capacity to analyse vast datasets and user behaviours, allowing brands to tailor their narratives with unprecedented precision. This shift, while promising enhanced personalisation, also raises concerns regarding the potential dehumanisation of brand expressions and the erosion of authentic connections (Oldfield, 2023).

It seems that artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and data analytics now play a pivotal role in understanding consumer behaviour and tailoring new narratives within the brand humanisation process. One notable aspect of how consumers are engaging with brands using sentient like AI is through chatbots and virtual assistants. Chatbots and virtual assistants, for example, have become extensions of brand personalities, engaging in real-time conversations, and adapting their responses based on user interactions. The incorporation of AI into branding practices is a strategic move that requires a more comprehensive understanding of technological engagement of consumers with the marketing communications used by brands (Hollebeek et al. 2021).

### **Natural Interaction Models under Generative AI in brand creative narratives**

We utilise emerging theories around *natural interaction models (NIM)* (Yalçın and DiPaola, 2020, Chignell et al. 2023, Rezwana & Maher, 2023) to conceptualise a high-level typology of key human centred engagement in the adoption of GAI practices within brand creative narratives. NIM refers to the design and implementation of systems that enable human-technology interactions in ways that seem intuitive and human like. While not yet a unified theory, NIM provides a valuable lens through which to better understand how technology can enhance rather than replace human experiences. The modelling process involves engaging,

understanding, and generating language processing contexts as well as the dynamic conversations captured within the interaction. These functionalities are facilitated by ongoing advancements in natural language processing, as well as deep machine learning (Just, 2024).

We argue that when it comes to the adoption of GAI practices within creative narrative routines of brands, human-centred engagement and ethical constructs play pivotal roles. Balancing technological innovation with human-centred design and ethical considerations is key to creating authentic, resonant, and trustworthy brand narratives in the evolving landscape of AI and branding (Morley, 2021). Upholding ethical storytelling practices becomes crucial to avoiding manipulative narrative constructions and ensuring that GAI practices contribute positively to the design of creative brand expressions.

Nevertheless, a balanced approach is necessary, acknowledging the potential of AI in enhancing certain aspects of creativity but also recognising its limitations in achieving the depth of imagination inherent to human creativity. We argue that striking this balance ensures that AI is a valuable tool in crafting narratives, but its role remains supplementary to the imaginative contributions of human creators of brand expression (Fisher & Hopp, 2020; Henriksen et al. 2020; Nishant et al. 2024; Tariq et al. 2022).

To be truly human is to have this independence of the mind. This ability for independent thinking cannot be replicated by machine learning for various reasons. There are many theories of the mind in literature, but this paper references Russell's Neutral Monism theory (Russell, 1921) which enriches the technology-human interaction debate by providing a thought-provoking perspective on the matter, that contrasts with the NIM theory. Neutral monism is a perspective in metaphysics and philosophy of mind which documents the relationship between mind and matter (Craig, 1998). According to Russell, as documented by Banks (2014), consciousness is not confined to mental or physical elements alone but emerges from a neutral ground, intertwining both aspects. In line with this, we argue that while AI can mimic patterns and responses, it remains devoid of the intrinsic conscious experience that characterises human creativity (Beaney, 2018). Therefore, as we navigate the integration of AI in crafting brand narratives, Russell's theory prompts reflection on the distinctiveness of human consciousness and the need to approach AI's role with an awareness of its inherent limitations in comprehending the depth and intricacies of human imagination and consciousness.

### **Ethical implications of GAI in branding**

Ultimately, our paper argues that to counter the emerging danger of brands merely mimicking emotions through AI, an additional layer can be incorporated into the Natural Interaction Model (NIM), which the authors label as the *Mindful Codes*. This supplementary dimension should specifically address the ethical implications of AI-driven emotional replication in brand narratives. By embedding principles such as transparency, technical safety, privacy, and good governance in data management, as well as ensuring diversity, non-discrimination, fairness, societal and environmental well-being, and accountability, practitioners can foster the development of meaningful brands (Whittlestone et al. 2019; Jobin et al. 2019). These brands would transcend superficial emotional mimicry, emphasising genuine connections and moral responsibility. Integrating these ethical considerations into NIM helps ensure that brands using AI maintain authenticity and positively impact consumers' emotional well-being, avoiding the potential pitfalls of manipulative emotional mimicry in the evolving landscape of AI and brand expression (Mittelstadt, 2019; Floridi and Cowsls, 2019; Fjeld et al. 2020). Additionally,

implementing such principles ensures AI systems' accountability and fairness, contributing to societal and environmental well-being (Cath, 2018; Binns, 2018). This approach aligns with broader research advocating for responsible AI practices (Erdélyi and Goldsmith, 2018; Taddeo and Floridi, 2018; Zhang et al. 2024; Lee and Park, 2024; Green and Viljoen, 2023; Turner and Ben, 2023).

### **Creative narrative processes as an engagement tool: The harnessing the power of AI**

The intersection of AI and branding throws up the fascinating challenge of infusing emotional resonance into narratives generated by sentient like AI. While these technologies excel in data analysis and pattern recognition, the ability to evoke genuine emotions remains a complex task. Scholars argue that the success of AI-driven creative processes in humanising brand expressions lies in the integration of emotional intelligence algorithms, allowing AI to comprehend and emulate human emotions authentically (Yalçın and DiPaola, 2020). Our paper argues that achieving this delicate balance between data-driven precision and emotional authenticity becomes imperative for brands aiming to establish deep connections with their audience.

As GAI becomes an integral part of brand narrative processing, consumer perceptions and trust will play pivotal roles in the success of these strategies. Research indicates that while consumers appreciate personalised experiences facilitated by AI, there is a simultaneous need for transparency regarding data usage and algorithmic decision-making (Du and Xie. 2021). Brands must therefore proactively address concerns related to privacy and algorithmic bias, fostering a sense of trust among consumers. The ethical deployment of GAI in branding practices will not only ensure compliance with emerging regulatory frameworks but also contribute to building a positive brand image, reinforcing the human-centric approach within technological advancements (Song et al. 2022).

The use of sentient AI in brand narratives has also extended to content creation. Some brands employ AI algorithms to generate compelling and relevant content, from blog posts to social media updates (Capatina et al. 2020). This not only streamlines the content creation process but also ensures consistency in brand messaging. Consumers appreciate the fresh and engaging content produced by AI (Hollebeek et al. 2024) contributing to a more dynamic and interesting brand narrative. We label this as moves towards varying levels of '*prompted sentience*' within technology that allows brands to establish a more human-like connection, fostering a sense of relatability and understanding. This shift would not only enhance customer engagement but would also redefine the dynamics of the brand-consumer relationship. But while the use of sentient like AI in brand narratives offers numerous benefits, it is not without challenges. Privacy concerns, ethical considerations, and the potential for misinterpretation by AI systems are some of the issues that brands must navigate carefully. Striking the right balance between technological innovation and human touch is crucial to maintaining trust and credibility with consumers. We therefore propose some guidelines in the use of prompted sentience in GAI for the development of brand narratives. The table below summarises this approach.

**Table 2 Emergent typologies of GAI-Branding Interactions (Prompted sentence in brand Communications)**

Prompted Sentence Typologies	Adapted Theoretical Underpinning	Potential Branding Devices	Adapted Theoretical Underpinning	Potential GAI-Branding Interactions (prompted sentence)
<b>Reactive vs. Proactive Sentence</b>	Prentice et al. (2020)	Brand Archetype	Jung (1919)	In brand narratives, reactive sentence can manifest through AI-driven customer service chatbots that respond to user inquiries about the brand. Proactive sentence, on the other hand, can enhance brand narratives by anticipating consumer needs. For instance, a brand using proactive AI might offer personalized product recommendations based on the user's past interactions and preferences. This aligns well with the brand archetypes, allowing brands to embody specific archetypal characters in response to the evolving needs and preferences of individual users.
<b>Temporal Sentence</b>	Winters (2021)	Brand Purpose	Derqui (2022)	Temporal sentence can enhance brand narratives by adapting to the evolving nature of consumer preferences over time. Short-term temporal adjustments may involve real-time changes in communication style, while long-term adjustments could contribute to the brand's ability to tell a consistent and evolving story that resonates with consumers throughout their journey with the brand, connecting to the brand's purpose and values.
<b>Emotional Sentence</b>	Kauffman (2015)	Brand Emotional Resonance	Keller (1998)	Emotional sentient AI contributes significantly to brand narratives by allowing brands to create emotionally resonant experiences. AI systems that can recognize and respond to user emotions can tailor narratives that elicit specific emotional responses, enhancing the overall impact and memorability of the brand story.
<b>Contextual Sentence</b>	Stark et al. (2017)	Brand journey	Loureiro (2023)	Contextual sentient AI can be vital in ensuring that brand narratives remain relevant in various situations. By understanding where users are in their journey with the brand, AI systems can tailor narratives to match specific stages, providing relevant and contextually appropriate content.
<b>Benevolent Sentence</b>	Singer (2006)	Brand trust	Delgado-Ballester (2005)	Benevolent sentient AI plays a crucial role in building trust within brand narratives. Brands can use AI systems that provide transparent explanations for their recommendations, reinforcing the authenticity and reliability of the narrative.
<b>Multi-Modal Sentence</b>	Town (2007); Li et al. (2022)	Brand Storytelling	Aimé (2021); Hong et al. (2022)	Multi-modal sentient AI contributes to the richness of brand narratives by enabling engagement across various channels. Brands can leverage multiple modalities, such as text, images, and voice, to create a cohesive and immersive storytelling experience. For example, interactive voice assistants or AI-generated visual content can enhance the multi-sensory appeal of brand narratives.

### **Research Question three:**

*What are the evolving constitutive rules, routines, and dynamic capabilities of digital marketing agencies as they incorporate generative AI technologies into their practices?*

#### **Constitutive rules, foundational routines, and dynamic capabilities.**

To fully realise the potential of new technologies, digital agencies must remain knowledgeable and adaptive as they evolve. Theoretical frameworks such as Searle's theory of constitutive rules, (Searle, 1995), Teece's meta-organising framework of dynamic capabilities (Teece et al. 1997) and other ancillary cultural-cognitive practice theories, have long been used by researchers to theorise on the emergence and long-term successful performance of the firm. We briefly elucidate on these two:

#### **Searle's theory of constitutive rules**

Searle's notion of constitutive norms is critical for understanding how social and institutional realities are produced. Constitutive rules form the basis of social practices, defining and enabling certain acts within a social environment. They are not just about regulating behaviour but are vital in generating the possibility of activities, such as games, language, and institutional truths (see: Uskali, 2021; Hindriks, 2011; Hage, 2018).

We argue that the adoption of GAI technologies in digital agencies entails developing new constitutive rules that govern how these technologies are integrated into existing processes and used to create new types of content and services. These guidelines establish appropriate use norms, ethical considerations, and output quality for GAI systems. Constitutive rules, for example, could govern the processes for assessing and approving AI-generated material to ensure that it is consistent with the agency's values and client expectations.

Shared understanding amongst agency members is critical for building an environment in which GAI technologies can be effectively harnessed for innovation and competitive advantage without the loss of the agency's unique character.

#### **Teece's dynamic capabilities**

Teece et al. (1997) introduce the concept of dynamic capabilities that refers to an organisation's ability to integrate, grow, and restructure internal and external competencies to respond to quickly changing circumstances. Teece and other proponents (Teece et al. 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Winter, 2003) argue that these dynamic skills are idiosyncratic and anchored in a company's history, making them distinctive and difficult to replicate.

The dynamic capabilities framework provides a conceptualisation of how digital agencies might include GAI technology into their brand creative narrative processes. It emphasises the significance of a firm's ability to recognize, seize, and transform opportunities in fast changing contexts. In the case of digital agencies, this corresponds to the ability to recognise advances in GAI technologies and implement these technologies in ways that change their brand creative narrative processes and routines for the better.

Dynamic capabilities may therefore be understood as an orchestration of foundational routines around three broad sets of capabilities, namely sensing, which is a discovery function focused on identifying opportunities and threats posed by the new technology within the operating environment; Seizing, which is a business modelling function focused on mobilising GAI resources to deliver improved practices), and thirdly, Transformation (which delivers evolutionary fitness, strategic advantage and on-going firm success through continuous renewal and reconfiguration of the internal assets of the firm) (Teece et al.1997)

Foundational routines are defined as repeatable, recognized patterns of interdependent behaviours performed by several actors. (Feldman et al. 2016; Abell et al. 2008) They function as knowledge repositories and provide the micro foundations for organisational and dynamic capacities.

Sensing recognises technology breakthroughs and business potential associated to GAI. Staying up to date on the latest AI advances allows digital agencies to find possible applications that correspond with their strategic goals and client needs. This proactive approach allows agencies to foresee changes in the digital landscape and position themselves as pioneers in using AI for creative and strategic solutions.

The agency's ability to integrate GAI technologies into their service offerings enables them to capitalize on identified opportunities (seizing). This could include investing in AI technologies, creating new AI-powered goods, or restructuring existing service processes to include AI capabilities. The capacity to seize opportunities rapidly is critical for retaining a competitive edge in the fast-paced digital economy.

The agency's transformation involves adapting and reconfiguring internal and external competencies to integrate GAI. This entails adapting organizational structures, processes, and culture to support AI-driven innovation. Transformation ensures that GAI is thoroughly ingrained in the agency's operational and strategic frameworks, rather than being a mere addition.

The inherent limitation in the sole use of constitutive rules to conceptualise how agencies are adopting GAI might be in its inability to adjust for the rapid nature of the changing technological landscape (see Jacobs et al. 2013). Constitutive rules capture 'best practices' agreed by all as they interact within the ecosystem. The ordinary routines and capabilities required to 'play the game' but do not capture the innovations and improvisations required to win in the future. (Teece & Pisano, 2003) To win through a sustained sequence of organisational fitness, digital agencies must have dynamic capabilities to properly adopt, adapt and innovate GAI technology within these established routines. We therefore see the dynamic capabilities paradigm as being helpful in overlaying a more strategic and 'yes', dynamic view of the firm activities on top of the necessary arrangements that have helped to constitute the GAI adopting processes in the first place.

We further suggest that the adoption of GAI within digital creative firms is more effectively investigated by paying close attention to the impact that it has on the foundational routines of digital agencies. Routines are better understood as the genes of an organisation and constitute the basis for practices (Feldman et al. 2016; Abell et al. 2008). Understanding the adoption of GAI technologies in digital agencies necessitates understanding brand creative narrative routines as the set of foundational routines captured within critical competencies. It also

necessitates a deeper cognition of the tensions that are being witnessed as agencies evolve to accommodate these changes that come with GAI technology within these routines. These theoretical views can assist digital agencies manage the problems and opportunities posed by generative AI.

Creative narrative routines within the digital agency are therefore orchestrated as types of organisational routines that are specifically designed to facilitate creative expression and story creation. They develop over time as repeated patterns of interdependent acts performed by numerous actors within an organisation to then become capabilities and practices uniquely tied to the digital agencies. These routines give a systematic framework for creative work, allowing for the incorporation of innovative storytelling strategies and the experimentation with various narrative approaches in ways that they might then become recognisable outputs referred to as 'proprietary agency methodologies.' From an organisational standpoint this has historically formed a key basis by which the digital agency establishes difference and competitive advantage, captured in agency slogans and monikers.

### **Constituting new rules, routines, and dynamic capabilities for AI adopting digital marketing agencies.**

The introduction of generative AI has resulted in the birth of new and disruptive and fluid agency models, such as the "infinite agency" that relies exclusively on AI tools and the hybrid agency, which mixes human creativity with AI technology (Greenough, 2023) This shift has demanded a rethinking of operating models and threatens the potential loss of old creative narrative craftsmanship, which we define as a set of uniquely human-driven as well as human centred routines and capabilities that produce outputs and artefacts elicit uniquely human sentient responses.

It could also be argued that the disruptive potential of generative AI to improve customer journeys and develop greater efficiencies within a brand's narrative and expressive structures combining human experience with AI capabilities now provides exceptional value to customers. Yet we argue that more inquiry is required into better understand and possibly calibrate the potential loss of the human sentient element within the new value equation created. One proposed way of doing this is through an assessment of GAI impact on the ostensive, performative routine structures and core artefacts (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Biesenthal et al. 2019) of the creative narrative routines that we earlier identified.

Feldman & Pentland (2003) define ostensive routines as aspects within the routine that represent the ideal or typical form of a routine. It is the abstract, generalized pattern or script that people within the organisation understand as the routine, and provides a guide for action that helps individuals understand what the routine is and how it should be performed in theory. The performative aspect, on the other hand, refers to the actual performance of the routine by specific people, at specific times, and in specific places. It is the enactment of the routine, which may vary from the ostensive aspect due to the unique conditions and variations that occur during each performance. The essential difference between both aspects being what is planned for as opposed to what is performed as a routine. The researchers, further define a routine artefact as a 'physical or symbolic entity that can serve as a proxy for the ostensive aspect of a routine or can provide an archival trace of the performative aspect'.

The table 3 below provides a high-level conceptual analysis of the impact of GAI on ostensive and performative routine aspects as well as routine artefacts on the human-sentient creative



narrative routines of digital agencies. We assess the perceived degree of impact that GAI adoption has had on various aspects found within brand creative narrative routine.

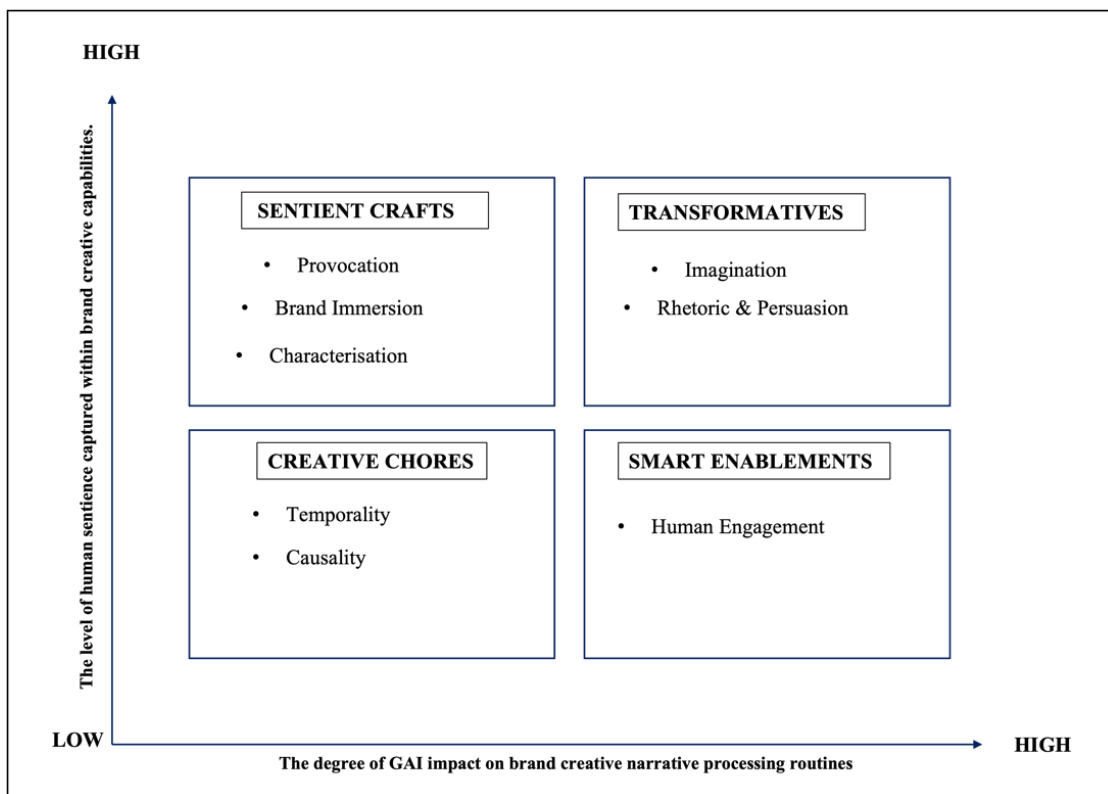
**Table 3: Mapping the impact of GAI on ostensive and performative routines of brand creative narrative processes within the digital marketing agency.**

<b>Narrative Capabilities</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>GAI impact on Ostensive Routines</b>	<b>GAI impact on Performative Routines</b>	<b>GAI impact on Routine Artefacts</b>
Imagination	The action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visualisation</li> </ul>	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative direction</li> </ul>	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mood/Storyboards</li> <li>• Scamps/mock-ups</li> <li>• Scripts</li> <li>• Wireframes/prototypes</li> <li>• Mind maps</li> </ul>
Rhetoric & Persuasion	The art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copy &amp; art</li> </ul>	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> </ul>	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copy/scripts</li> <li>• Visuals/Designs</li> <li>• Keywords/metatags</li> <li>• backlinks</li> <li>• Prompts</li> <li>• Email</li> </ul>
Provocation	The act of provoking, arousing, or stimulating a human response	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copy &amp; art</li> </ul>	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentiments</li> <li>• Social proof</li> </ul>
Human Engagement	The intentional act of interacting with a human audience to turn them from passive spectators to active participants	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital connectors</li> </ul>	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital channels</li> </ul>	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital marketing plan</li> <li>• Personas</li> <li>• Customer Journey Maps</li> <li>• Funnels</li> <li>• A/B tests</li> </ul>
Temporality	The state of existing within or having some relationship with time	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative plot</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative plot</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storyboards</li> <li>• Scripts</li> </ul>
Characterisation	The creation or construction of a fictional character within a story	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative structure</li> </ul>	Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative structure</li> </ul>	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand Archetypes</li> <li>• Personas</li> </ul>
Causality	The relationship between cause and effect within a narrative text	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative structure</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative structure</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storyboards</li> <li>• Scripts/</li> </ul>
Brand Essence	The core characteristics of a brand that elicits an emotional response in consumers	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision</li> <li>• Name/symbol</li> <li>• Features &amp; benefits</li> <li>• Value proposition &amp; positioning</li> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision</li> <li>• Name/symbol</li> <li>• Features &amp; benefits</li> <li>• Value proposition &amp; positioning</li> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand essence wheel</li> <li>• Brand digital marketing plan</li> <li>• Creative brief</li> <li>• Consumer Insight</li> </ul>

When set against a 2x2 matrix, we can further conceptualise the impact of the technology (GAI) on the brand creative narrative routines, along four lines:

1. Creative chores- Low human sentient -low GAI involvement routines
2. Smart enablements-Low human sentient-high GAI involvement routines
3. Sentient crafts- High human sentient-low GAI involvement routines
4. Transformatives- High human sentient-high GAI involvement routines

**Figure 4 Mapping the impact of GAI on ostensive and performative brand creative narrative routines**

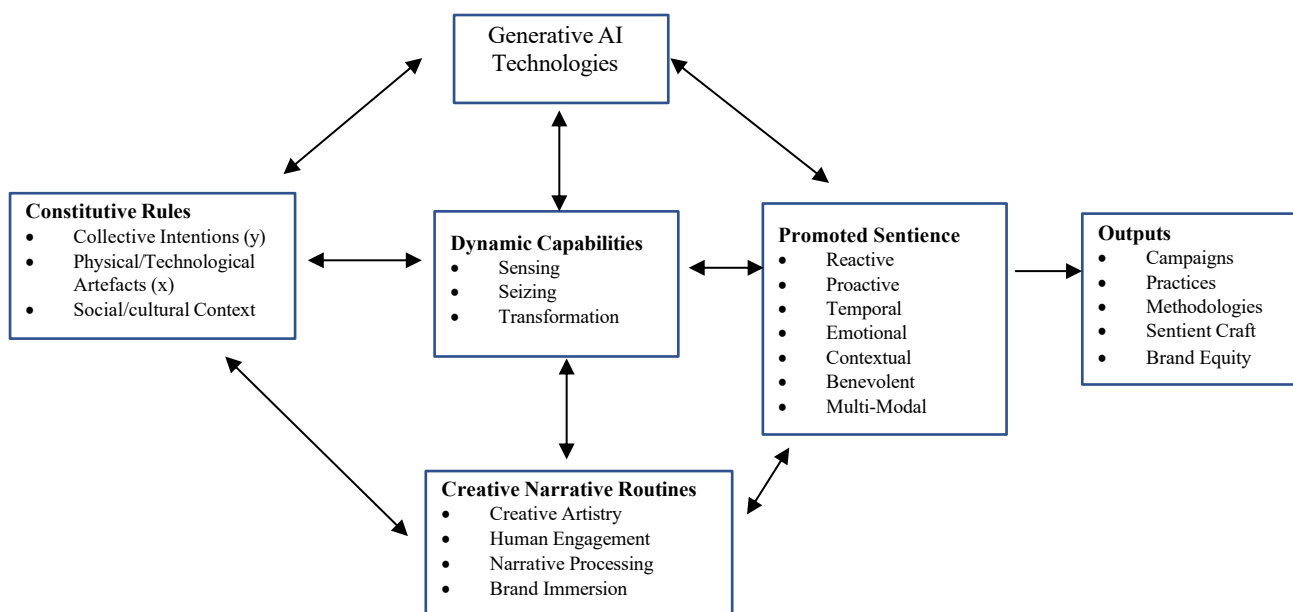


By conceptualising these shifts, we argue that all organisations are improvising new organisational creativity capabilities that reflect across routines and establish important outputs and routine artefacts such as methodologies, sentient crafts, that may potentially assume premium value, and ultimately delivering enhanced brand equity.

It shows that the GAI-human artistry-brand interaction is not necessarily diametrically opposed to organisational routines, but can be complementary, and potentially transformative. By embedding creative story routines into the broader framework of organisational routines, organisations may establish an atmosphere that encourages and supports creativity and improvised innovation.

The agency's mastery of its range of creative routines because of having repeated, recombined, conversed, and established higher order routine priorities over time grants it a perceived reputation, that opens new opportunities for agency activities and services. Please see figure 5 that integrates all these theoretical perspectives discussed. It provides a high-level module that conceptualises how generative AI Adoption within digital marketing agencies is influenced and operationalised by underlying constitutive rules, creative narrative routines and dynamic capabilities, and the interaction between the technology, human agency, and the brand to evolve new routines we call prompted sentient practices.

**Figure 5** A high level conceptualisation of generative AI adoption and operationalisation within brand creative narrative processes in digital marketing agencies



## Conclusions & Limitations: Towards a counter theory of sentient- AI creative narrative craftsmanship

The purpose of the paper is conceptual development, envisaging new ideas through the revision and integration of multiple theoretical perspective, and thereby contributing new and robust conceptual syntheses and typologies (MacInnis, 2011). The paper has focused on brand creative narrative practice within digital agencies and sought to understand how the disruptive technology that generative AI is currently impacts these routines within digital agency practices.

The study suggests that while GAI technologies are having a significant impact on brand creative narrative routines and practices, human sentient routines are still relevant and pertinent within agency practices. We offer the following emergent propositions and contributions.

We offer an illumination of the 'potential forces at play'. We conceptualise that the implementation of generative AI technologies in digital agencies is a complex interplay of shared objectives, dynamic capabilities, and foundational routines, all supported by marketing communications ecosystem have motivated digital agency teams to integrate GAI into existing workflows and open new avenues for creativity. We observe that foundational procedures, routines, and capabilities are potentially granting digital agencies the ability to discover, seize, and improvise the capabilities in ways that grant them competitive advantages. We find that in line

with extant literature, on evolutionary fitness generative AI applications are already being used in a variety of ways within digital agencies, ranging from automating content creation to improving social media strategies. However, as generative artificial intelligence is used to create more content, the industry is beginning to question the quality of impact, and we suggest that digital marketing agencies must also ask further questions about the loss of sentient creative narrative routines particularly the performative aspects of these routines which would otherwise be referred to as creative craftsmanship that imbue the practice with sentient qualities.

An underlying premise within our study is that the client, and end consumer of digital marketing services value sentient creative narrative routines, and the craft sufficiently enough to want to see it remain as a key aspect of the value proposition delivered within brand communications. There is sufficient evidence within the literature, to suggest that this is true, but further inquiry is needed to better understand how this might change over time. As these technologies grow more popular, digital agencies will be compelled to renegotiate what constitutes for good performance. The case of mobile payment systems as addressed by Ehret & Olaniyan, (2023), demonstrates how constitutive rules might influence the institutionalisation of new technology. Similarly, digital agencies must navigate business, socio cultural as well as society's fundamental laws to effectively integrate generative AI. They must also evaluate the ethical consequences and develop criteria for responsible use, possibly through AI charters and other new institutional arrangements for shared intentions that promote the preservation of sentient practices.

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