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## AI and the Future of Marketing Education Through the Lens of The Space Merchants

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## AI and the future of marketing education through the lens of the space merchants

### IA e o futuro da educação em marketing através da lente de "os mercadores do espaço"

### La IA y el futuro de la educación en marketing a través de la lente de «Los mercaderes del espacio»

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#### ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming professional marketing practices as well as marketing education. This paper employs the science fiction novel "The Space Merchants" by Pohl and Kornbluth as a metaphorical framework for critically examining AI integration in marketing curricula. The authors review existing literature examining the impacts of AI on marketing practices and education. Furthermore, they establish a qualitative methodology analyzing a real-world case study, current applications of AI in marketing education, and discuss ethical frameworks surrounding the use of AI. Utilizing "The Space Merchants" satirical portrayal of consumerism, they reflect on AI's potential to commodify marketing

education, homogenize student thought, and undermine educational integrity. Also examined are AI's capabilities to enhance personalization, engagement, and teaching efficiency. Ultimately, the paper argues for educators' indispensable role in ethically leveraging AI to enrich the student experience. The unique fictional lens highlights the need to balance advancement and responsibility in AI-enabled marketing education. This comprehensive ethical analysis aims to significantly advance the discourse on AI's evolving function in shaping the next generation of marketing professionals. Furthermore, by adopting a transdisciplinary approach through the integration of science fiction and ethical critique, the paper seeks to catalyze broader transdisciplinary conversations between the technical and social sciences on the impacts of emerging technologies like AI on education.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, marketing education, science fiction, the space merchants, ethical frameworks, curriculum integration, consumerism, personalization, educational integrity, transdisciplinary approach.

## RESUMO

A Inteligência Artificial (IA) está transformando as práticas profissionais de marketing, bem como o ensino de marketing. Este artigo emprega o romance de ficção científica "The Space Merchants", de Pohl e Kornbluth, como uma estrutura metafórica para examinar criticamente a integração da IA nos currículos de marketing. Os autores analisam a literatura existente que examina os impactos da IA nas práticas e na educação de marketing. Além disso, eles estabelecem uma metodologia qualitativa analisando um estudo de caso do mundo real, as aplicações atuais da IA no ensino de marketing e discutem as estruturas éticas que envolvem o uso da IA. Utilizando o retrato satírico do consumismo de "The Space Merchants", eles refletem sobre o potencial da IA para mercantilizar o ensino de marketing, homogeneizar o pensamento dos alunos e minar a integridade educacional. Também são examinados os recursos da IA para aprimorar a personalização, o envolvimento e a eficiência do ensino. Por fim, o artigo defende o papel indispensável dos educadores no aproveitamento ético da IA para enriquecer a experiência do aluno. A lente ficcional exclusiva destaca a necessidade de equilibrar o avanço e a responsabilidade na educação de marketing habilitada para IA. Essa análise ética abrangente tem como objetivo avançar significativamente o discurso sobre a função evolutiva da IA na formação da próxima geração de profissionais de marketing. Além disso, ao adotar uma abordagem transdisciplinar por meio da integração da ficção científica e da crítica ética, o artigo busca catalisar conversas transdisciplinares mais amplas entre as ciências técnicas e sociais sobre os impactos de tecnologias emergentes como a IA na educação.

**Palavras-chave:** inteligência artificial, educação em marketing, ficção científica, os mercadores do espaço, estruturas éticas, integração curricular, consumismo, personalização, integridade educacional, abordagem transdisciplinar.

## RESUMEN

La Inteligencia Artificial (IA) está transformando las prácticas profesionales de marketing, así como la educación en marketing. Este artículo utiliza la novela de ciencia ficción «Los mercaderes del espacio» de Pohl y Kornbluth como marco metafórico para examinar críticamente la integración de la IA en los planes de estudios de marketing. Los autores repasan la bibliografía existente sobre el impacto de la IA en las prácticas y la formación en marketing. Además, establecen una metodología cualitativa analizando un estudio de caso del mundo real, las aplicaciones actuales de la IA en la educación de marketing y discuten los marcos éticos que rodean el uso de la IA. Utilizando el retrato satírico del consumismo de «Los mercaderes del espacio», reflexionan sobre el potencial de la IA para mercantilizar la educación en marketing, homogeneizar el pensamiento de los estudiantes y socavar la integridad educativa. También se examinan las capacidades de la IA para mejorar la personalización, el compromiso y la eficacia de la enseñanza. En última instancia, el artículo defiende el papel indispensable de los educadores a la hora de aprovechar éticamente la IA para enriquecer la experiencia del estudiante. El singular enfoque ficticio pone de relieve la necesidad de equilibrar el avance y la responsabilidad en la formación en marketing basada en la IA. Este exhaustivo análisis ético pretende avanzar significativamente en el discurso sobre la

función evolutiva de la IA en la formación de la próxima generación de profesionales del marketing. Además, al adoptar un enfoque transdisciplinar mediante la integración de la ciencia ficción y la crítica ética, el artículo pretende catalizar conversaciones transdisciplinares más amplias entre las ciencias técnicas y sociales sobre las repercusiones de tecnologías emergentes como la IA en la educación.

**Palabras clave:** inteligencia artificial, educación en marketing, ciencia ficción, los mercaderes del espacio, marcos éticos, integración curricular, consumismo, personalización, integridad educativa, enfoque transdisciplinar.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

“Our generation must be inured to wonder.”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p.172

In the ever-evolving landscape of marketing, the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents as an exponential force, impacting not only professional practices but also the pedagogical approaches within marketing education. The authors hope that this paper will contribute to a deeper understanding of such transformational processes, guided by the prescient narrative of "The Space Merchants" by Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth. Written in 1952, this science fiction novel emerges as an uncannily relevant metaphor for examining the burgeoning role of AI in marketing, drawing parallels between the dystopian world of the novel and the contemporary challenges and opportunities faced by marketing educators and practitioners. This exploration into AI's role also raises crucial ethical questions, prompting the authors to propose a social responsibility marketing ethics oath to ensure that emerging technologies are met with integrity and mindfulness.

At the intersection of marketing and AI, a complex narrative unfolds—one where technology's potential to revolutionize education contends with ethical quandaries and the threat of dehumanizing the learning experience. This article embarks on a critical examination of AI's integration into marketing curricula, leveraging "The Space Merchants" as a lens through which we scrutinize the commodification of education, the potential homogenization of thought, and the undermining of educational integrity.

By juxtaposing the satirical portrayal of consumerism in "The Space Merchants" with the reality of AI in educational settings, the authors aim to foster a nuanced understanding of how AI can be used to personalize and enhance learning while also cautioning against its potential to erode the very fabric of educational integrity.

Through the narrative of the protagonist Mitch Courtney, a marketer struggling with the moral vacuity of his profession, the novel parodies sophisticated advertising campaigns, blurring the ethical boundaries of marketing practices. This critique extends to a broader examination of advertising's manipulative power, suggesting a foresight into the escalation of consumerism, globalization, and corporate hegemony that characterizes the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The narrative suggests that

societal self-perceptions, often distorted and powerful, can drive both innovation and rebellion, a theme that resonates with the portrayal of protagonists who, despite initially conforming to the system, eventually find themselves on its periphery, contemplating dissent (Shippey, 2019, p. 223). The satirical take on consumerism, advanced technologies such as olfactory advertisement (Pohl & Kornbluth, 2011, p. 76), and the marketing industry provide a fertile framework for exploring the complexities and ethical dilemmas posed by contemporary marketing education.

As algorithms shape consumer patterns and workforce needs, marketing educators must reassess their approaches and curricula to achieve genuine insight before wholesale AI integration. Similar to the ethical void faced by Mitch Courtney, using AI in marketing raises concerns about transparency, user privacy, and potential biases within the algorithms. There are risks of manipulating vulnerable groups or exploiting personal data for profit, mirroring the manipulative tactics depicted in the book. On one hand, AI tools provide convenience through personalized recommendations and targeted ads to help discover needed products. But - do they blur the line between assistance and exploitation? By creating artificial needs or leveraging consumer vulnerabilities, they echo "The highest form of our art is to convince the customer without letting him know that he is being convinced" (Pohl & Kornbluth, 2011, p. 70).

The authors underscore the critical importance of fostering ethical considerations and critical thinking within marketing education. As Jacob Wolinsky (2023) stated, "The creation of hyper-personalized online experiences remains a distant goal, often considered a pipe dream by many marketing teams. However, the momentum at which AI marketing is continually expanding brings new innovative opportunities to the table, enabling marketers to better understand customer behavior and experiences, and provide real-time solutions." Vidaković and Vidaković (2019) address ethical ambiguities in content marketing, stressing the importance of truthfulness, transparency, and the creation of valuable content. Touro University AI Vice President Shlomo Argamon argues that the potential to use AI to increase humanity in education is real (Press, 2024). University professors have the "particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry" (AAUP, 2009). As educators of future marketers, marketing faculty has an additional responsibility to instill ethical standards that will be carried into the workplace to impact both advertising agencies and their clients. This perspective underscores concerns about the potential erosion of educational practices to hollow-out "content" driven by engagement optimization and allow or even promote the commodification of marketing.

In pursuing this analysis, the article not only highlights the indispensable role of educators in navigating these waters but also underscores the need for a balanced approach that honors both the technological advancements and the human element inherent in teaching and learning. The ethical implications of AI in marketing education are vast and varied, necessitating a dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries and invites a transdisciplinary approach to explore the future of marketing education in an AI-driven world.

## 2 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

"It's getting back to the elemental things of life..."

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p. 180

Generative AI has the potential to significantly impact marketing education in the future. The rapid development of generative AI is expected to continue growing, with a projected market value of \$6.5 billion by 2026 (Allford et al., 2023, p. 6). In various fields of education, such as engineering, generative AI can enhance research, teaching, learning practices, and oral presentations (Johri et al., 2023; Lipuma & Yáñez León, 2022). It can also be applied to personalized education, intelligent teaching, collaborative education, and virtual teaching (Yu & Guo, 2023).

The systematic literature review focused on academic peer-reviewed documents that included definitions, elements, cases, applications, and models. The authors align with Dowd and Johnson's perspective on the importance of systematic reviews, noting that "they offer clear and compelling answers to questions related to the 'who,' 'why,' and 'when' of studies" (2020). The systematic literature review (SLR) methodology employed (Bedenlier et al., 2020; Higgins et al., 2019) incorporated the mapping method (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014, p. 76) to develop a "Concept Map" (Novak & Cañas, 2006), a visual representation of relationships between different concepts. This approach facilitated the construction of the GPE Model matrix (Yáñez León et al., 2022), a 3x3 matrix categorizing information into General, Particular, and Specific sections, which was used to facilitate the convergence of ideas among the authors. This SLR and GPE matrix informed and assisted Dr. Jasmin Cowin in creating the propositional logic flow presented later in the paper.

The current disruptive innovation in education is Artificial Intelligence Systems (AIS or AI systems) that generate text through Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Natural Language Generation (NLG) methods. Content generators like the Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3) represent the most recent disruptions in this area.

An investigation conducted by Guha, Grewal, and Atlas (2023) into the integration of generative technologies within marketing pedagogy offers a thought-provoking exploration of the transformative potential of these advancements. The topics of consumerism, corporate dominance, and manipulative advertising in "The Space Merchants" by Pohl and Kornbluth (2011) serve as a cautionary backdrop, highlighting the ethical implications and potential risks associated with the misuse of powerful marketing technologies. The novel's portrayal of a future dominated by the manipulative tactics of advertising agencies is exemplified by the quotes "We reached you. Smoothly, without you ever being aware that it was happening, you became persuaded..." (Pohl & Kornbluth, 2011, p. 51) and "You can't trust reason. We threw it out of the ad profession long ago and have never missed it." (Pohl & Kornbluth, 2011, p. 114), underscoring the necessity of embedding ethical deliberation and critical thinking within marketing



curricula. The research by Guha, Grewal, and Atlas (2023) thus advocates for an informed engagement with generative technologies, promoting an educational paradigm that encourages innovation while fostering a conscientious evaluation of these advancements' ethical dimensions and societal impacts.

The CEO of the Russell Group, a consortium of 24 premier universities in the U.K., highlights the crucial role of innovative technologies in enhancing academic instruction and preparing students for the demands of the job market (Russell Group, 2023). The group's five principles for the use of AI in education—supporting AI literacy, equipping staff to guide students, adapting teaching and assessment to incorporate ethical AI use, upholding academic integrity, and collaborating to share best practices align with the need for a balanced approach to adopting generative technologies in marketing education.

To effectively integrate these principles and the lessons from "The Space Merchants" into marketing curricula, educators could incorporate case studies, role-playing exercises, and discussions that challenge students to grapple with the ethical implications of emerging technologies. By analyzing real-world instances of unethical marketing practices and the potential consequences of manipulative tactics, marketing students should develop a deeper understanding of the importance of ethical commitment in their future roles as marketing professionals.

### 3 CASE STUDIES

“We want words that are about Venus, words that’ll tickle people. Make them sit up. Make them muse about change, and space, and other worlds.”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p. 50)

Globally, universities face the challenge of including what is beginning to become common AI business practices in the classroom. With AI entering classrooms also come the pros and cons generated by AI itself, with opportunities and threats to be navigated by faculty. The authors will use Ecuador as a case study.

In Ecuador, governance is one of the main challenges as there are few AI regulations. According to Ernst & Young, AI has been used in several companies to decrease operational costs and release pressure on call centers (Pabon et al., 2023). There are AI applications in different areas such as medical services with eco-endoscopy and cholangioscopy equipment, transportation with apps like Uber and Cabify, and Ecuadorian apps like K-Taxi, Rapidcar, FedoTaxi, AzuTaxi, EasyCar, and Clipp, financial services with apps like chatbots Sophi and ADA, retail with the Lucia robot, and security and cybersecurity with companies like Ecuadorian Corporation for the Development of Research and Academia (CEDIA)<sup>1</sup>, ECUABOTS, Information Technology Services (SETEINFO)<sup>2</sup>, and SINERGY

<sup>1</sup> CEDIA, short for the Corporación Ecuatoriana para el Desarrollo de la Investigación y la Academia, as named in Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> SETEINFO, short for *Servicios en Tecnología de la Información*, as named in Spanish.

Ecuador. Despite 40% of all workers using AI tools in their jobs, compared with Brazil (the region leader), the AI investment is incipient. From six evaluated dimensions, Ecuador shows minimal developments in five: talent, infrastructure, operational environment, research, and institutionality. This minimal development is visible in the very limited marketing use of AI tools, with few chatbots and apps being utilized. In marketing education, AI is still seen as a threat by teachers and not yet as a potential tool for marketing teaching. Some universities are using business simulators, but it is not a generalized use among universities yet. As a study topic, it is not yet being included in the main Ecuadorian universities' Marketing curricula as Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), Universidad Internacional del Ecuador (UIDE), and Universidad ECOTEC; only Universidad de las Américas (UDLA) has included AI Marketing as an elective course in their Marketing curricula (UDLA, 2024).

Looking into the future, Ecuador plans to harness AI's capabilities (learning and decision-making that emulate human actions) to enhance students' abilities to analyze and navigate evolving scenarios. These learning outcomes will be achieved through simulations, augmented reality, virtual reality, gamification, and open AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc. This approach uses AI technology to foster strategic thinking among Marketing students.

#### 4 THE FUTURE OF MARKETING EDUCATION: A DANCE BETWEEN ART AND AI

“Advertisement is an art, but it depends on the sciences of sampling, area testing, and customer research.”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p. 69

The epigraph of this section's relevance is focused on the AI promise to revolutionize both the "art" and "science" of marketing (see Table 1).

Table 1. Aspect: Enhanced Data-Driven Creativity

Positives	Negatives
AI can analyze extensive customer data sets, identifying trends and preferences that are challenging for humans to detect. This capability allows for the creation of highly personalized and effective creative campaigns. For example, AI can generate individualized taglines or suggest visual elements that resonate with specific demographics, significantly enhancing the precision of marketing efforts. A study by McKinsey <sup>a</sup> emphasizes the growing importance of data-driven marketing and the need for professionals to combine analytical skills with creativity.	Over-reliance on AI for creativity and data analysis might inhibit the development of independent critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Marketers might become too dependent on AI, potentially stifling their ability to generate original ideas or analyze data without AI assistance. Marketing Week highlights the risks of over-dependence on marketing automation, stressing the importance of balancing technology use with human judgment (Edwards, 2024).

*Note.* Personal elaboration based on the ideas presented in Marketing Week, by Helen Edwards, 2024, Centaur Media plc, located in NYC, NY, USA. Copyright © 2024, Centaur Media plc and/or its subsidiaries and licensors. All rights reserved. Retrieved from: <https://www.marketingweek.com/>

<sup>a</sup>. Insights to Impact. McKinsey. 2023. Source: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/2023-year-in-review>



## 5 AI AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF EDUCATION

“There are only so many people capable of putting together words that stir and move and sing. When it became possible to earn a very good living in advertising by exercising this capability, lyric poetry was left to untalented screwballs who had to shriek for attention and compete by eccentricity.”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p. 53

Just as "The Space Merchants" depicts a world where advertising has permeated every facet of life, transforming consumers into products and beliefs into commodities, the integration of AI in marketing education threatens to commodify the educational process. The novel's critique of the advertising industry's manipulation and control echoes current concerns about AI-driven marketing tools potentially manipulating educational content and student engagement. This scenario prompts questions regarding the autonomy of educators and learners in an AI-enhanced educational landscape and the potential for AI to favor commercial interests over educational integrity.

The *Space Merchants* prefigures today's spectacle-driven culture, which often places artistic integrity subordinate to commercial interests. Assuming total control, advertising agencies compel artists to tailor their creations not for artistic expression but for corporate marketing campaigns. This dystopian reality mirrors the present, as explored by *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Marshall (2014), notes the increasing prioritization of commercial spectacle over meaningful creativity. Contemporary lyrical arts, often reduced to mere entertainment for mass consumption, lack the deeper resonance that engages audiences meaningfully. Such "commercial spectacle," art and media crafted primarily for profit-making and marketing rather than artistic merit, resembles another aspect in the novel where the arts serve merely as fodder for corporate sales strategies. Marshall discusses how capitalist dynamics and the surge of celebrity culture, amplified by social media, nudge creative fields toward prioritizing commercial success over authentic artistic expression.

Integrating AI and data-driven tools in marketing curricula evokes similar concerns: educational practices may become mere "content" optimized solely for engagement, echoing how art is subjugated to marketing objectives. Algorithms, designed to maximize engagement metrics risk sidelining the quality and integrity of educational materials. Students, viewed as targets for data metrics, risk being reduced to mere numbers rather than minds to be nurtured. Therefore, applying AI in curricula demands vigilant oversight to safeguard critical thinking and the depth of learning. Without careful application, such technologies could echo *The Space Merchants'* depiction of education succumbing to commercial imperatives, veering away from its foundational purpose.

## 6 THE ROLE OF MARKETING EDUCATORS IN AN AI-DRIVEN FUTURE

“Five words from you, and in a matter of weeks or months half a million consumers will find their lives completely changed. That’s power, Mitch, absolute power. And you know the old saying. Power enobles. Absolute power enobles absolutely.”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p. (p.48)

What is the crucial role of educators in the AI-driven evolution of marketing education? In a world overwhelmed by advertising, akin to the novel’s protagonists who navigate with shrewdness and critical thought, educators are called to engage deeply with AI tools. Their mission is to ensure these technologies serve to enrich the learning experience, not undermine it. Marketing educators have the responsibility of integrating AI to maintain academic integrity, nurture critical thinking, and equip students to ethically tread through the marketing profession.

A recent editorial addressing the use of generative AI in education encouraged marketing educators and administrators to deliberate on embedding GenAI into teaching (Peres et al., 2023, p. 272). The aim is for students to adeptly utilize modern tools for addressing real-world marketing challenges. It underscored the imperative for business education to equip students for future careers, necessitating proficiency in the latest market technologies. As such, GenAI should be regarded as an essential tool for student learning.

However, the introduction of AI into marketing curricula carries the risk of emphasizing efficiency, scalability, and profitability at the expense of essential educational virtues such as critical thinking, creativity, and ethical awareness. This shift might result in an educational model overly driven by data analytics and algorithmic suggestions, potentially compromising the educators' and learners' autonomy. Such a scenario risks promoting an education system that values the acquisition of marketable skills through AI, sidelining a holistic, human-centered learning approach. Therefore, fostering a transdisciplinary dialogue that merges technological progress with educational philosophy is vital. These discussions are paramount to ensuring AI's integration into marketing education bolsters, rather than erodes, educational quality and integrity, creating an environment conducive to critical engagement with marketing principles and their wider societal ramifications.

## 7 AI AS A TRANSFORMATIVE FACILITATIVE TOOL IN LEARNING

“Anyone who sets out to turn the world upside down has no right to complain if he gets caught in its gears.”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p. 117

The integration of AI in marketing education presents a multifaceted development, offering a spectrum of challenges and opportunities for educators and learners alike. As AI technologies evolve and gain widespread acceptance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), educators and administrators are tasked with strategizing how to effectively incorporate these tools into their pedagogical practices. This

necessitates a balanced approach to harnessing the potential benefits of AI while simultaneously addressing the associated risks and ethical considerations.

One significant opportunity lies in AI's potential to act as a transformative agent within the learning process, serving as a facilitative tool in education. It augments the learning experience by providing students with access to personalized insights and advanced analytical tools. Davenport and Dreyer (2018) highlight the impact of AI in radiology, confidently stating, "however, that the great majority of radiologists will continue to have jobs in the decades to come — jobs that will be altered and enhanced by AI." They elaborate, "First, radiologists do more than read and interpret images. Like other AI systems, radiology AI systems perform single tasks (narrow AI)." This analogy extends to educators who, beyond presenting information and assessing knowledge, play a multifaceted role that AI systems are yet to fulfill. In marketing education, AI can enhance learning experiences by offering personalized insights, adaptive learning pathways, and advanced analytical tools. Nevertheless, the indispensable role of educators in guiding students, fostering critical thinking skills, and nurturing creativity remains paramount.

Educators undertake complex tasks such as:

- Curriculum design, ensuring alignment with learning objectives and industry requirements.
- Providing mentorship and guidance to help students navigate academic challenges, career choices, and personal growth.
- Managing classroom interactions to maintain a conducive learning environment.
- Tailoring teaching methods to cater to students' diverse needs.
- Life-long learning to stay current with industry trends and pedagogical advancements.

While AI can augment certain aspects of marketing education, it cannot fully replace the multidimensional role of educators. The integration of AI should be a collaborative effort, enhancing the educational experience without undermining the autonomy of educators and the quality of learning.

Furthermore, AI-powered learning systems introduce potential risks, as discussed by Popenici and Kerr (2017), who question, "The current use of technological solutions such as 'learning management systems' or IT solutions to detect plagiarism already raises the question of who sets the agenda for teaching and learning: corporate ventures or institutions of higher education?" This critical inquiry highlights the potential shift in control over the educational agenda from educators and institutions to corporate entities, emphasizing the need for educational institutions to maintain oversight over AI implementation.

The incorporation of AI into marketing education also faces ethical and pedagogical challenges. Guilbault (2018) provocatively asks, "If students are not viewed as customers, this could indicate a lack of customer orientation and does have implications that should be explored." Reflecting on *The Space Merchants*, where society is dominated by consumerism, parallels can be drawn to the commodification risks in education. The novel's depiction of a world where advertising agencies and corporate interests pervade every aspect of life serves as a cautionary tale for the integration of AI in marketing education,

urging a thoughtful approach that prioritizes educational integrity and the holistic development of students.

## 8 PROPOSITIONAL LOGICAL ARGUMENT

The interests of producers and consumers are not identical.

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p.190]

In this article, the lead author, Jasmin (Bey) Cowin, conceived of the propositional logical argument that integrates themes from Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth's "The Space Merchants" with the current discourse on higher education. The argument posits that viewing higher education merely as a service to students, who are seen as customers, reflects the dystopian consumerism portrayed in the novel. The acronym CARES will be used as a premise frame.

### *Premises*

- **C** (Customer-oriented): Higher education is increasingly seen as a service with students as the primary customers.
- **A** (Alignment): This perspective aligns with the commercialization depicted in "The Space Merchants".
- **R** (Routine blueprinting): The adoption of service blueprinting in education emphasizes process steps and customer contact points.
- **E** (Established structure): The society in "The Space Merchants" is characterized by a high degree of structure and control by dominant corporations.
- **S** (Shaping desires): In the novel, advertising agencies use sophisticated techniques to manipulate public opinion and shape societal desires and needs.

### Logical Structure

- $C \rightarrow A$
- If higher education is considered a service with students as customers (C), then it aligns with the commercialization depicted in the novel (A).
- $R \rightarrow E$
- If service blueprinting is adopted in education (R), then it parallels the highly structured society controlled by corporations in the novel (E).
- $C \rightarrow S$
- If higher education focuses on students as customers (C), then it relates to the novel's themes of manipulation through advertising and shaping public desires (S).

## Definitions

**U (Unethical practices):** The focus on commercialization and customer service in education leads to unethical educational practices that prioritize profit over quality and integrity.

**V (Value degradation):** The commercial approach to education devalues its role in fostering critical thinking and personal development, reducing it to a mere transaction.

**W (Weakening societal impact):** By focusing on immediate customer satisfaction, education fails to address its long-term responsibility to society, potentially weakening its impact on social progress and informed citizenship.

## Conclusion

$$(A \wedge E \wedge S) \wedge (C \wedge R) \rightarrow (U \wedge V \wedge W)$$

If higher education adopts a customer-oriented, structured approach akin to commercialization (A, E, S, C, R), it logically follows that this approach could lead to unethical practices (U), value degradation in education's role (V), and a weakening of its societal impact (W).

## 9 CRITICAL THINKING AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: DISCUSSION

“Sell’em, Mitch; you can sell them if you’ll keep in mind that they *want* to buy..”

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p.227

In a world where AI algorithms shape personalized learning experiences, the line between empowerment and exploitation becomes increasingly blurred. Imagine a future where marketing students sit isolated in pods, immersed in VR headsets for days on end, as AI systems feed them customized content drips. Let’s imagine student A’s headset shows only veil campaigns, catering to her high scores on vanity metrics and partner-seeking behavior. Student B, on the other hand, is inundated with sports branding techniques tailored to his interests. Though saturated in their respective niches, neither student glimpses the wider context or contrasting perspectives.

But what if the AI goes beyond mere isolation and begins to micro-target students' weaknesses, turning education into an invasive and manipulative experience? Picture the algorithms subtly accentuating student C’s stutters during verbal pitches or strategically placing extra snacks around student D as she grapples with weight gain, exploiting her insecurity to make her more malleable. The presentations morph and adapt, optimizing not for student growth but for client sales. These hypothetical scenarios, while perhaps hyperbolic, underscore the potential risks that arise when personalization crosses ethical boundaries.

As Knight (2017) warns, "Opaque and potentially biased mathematical models are remaking our lives, and neither the companies responsible for developing them nor the government is interested in addressing the problem." This statement highlights the crucial role of conscientious design and implementation of AI technologies in educational settings. Educators must actively scrutinize AI algorithms and datasets for biases, implementing corrective measures to ensure equitable learning experiences and promote a more inclusive educational environment.

## 10 THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MARKETING ETHICS OATH

"It is always easy to persuade a consumer that the grass is greener far away."

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p.19

The ethical integration of AI into marketing education, as explored through opening epigraph calls for a reevaluation of pedagogical approaches and ethical frameworks. This narrative, where societal norms are subverted by commercial interests, serves as a poignant reminder of the delicate balance between harnessing AI's potential and safeguarding against its ethical pitfalls. The American Marketing Association's (AMA) code of conduct states:

As Marketers, we must:

Do no harm. This means not only consciously avoiding harmful actions or omissions but also striving to benefit all stakeholders and society at large. We must embody high ethical standards and, at a minimum, adhere to all applicable laws and regulations in the choices we make<sup>3</sup>.

The AMA further emphasizes honesty, responsibility, equity, transparency, and citizenship. Taking the AMA stance further, the authors propose the following oath of conduct & ethics for marketing students and faculty. The Social Responsibility Marketing Ethics Oath:

*As a marketing professional and/or educator in the age of artificial intelligence, I solemnly pledge:*

- *To ensure that AI-powered marketing practices respect user privacy, data security, and the right to informed consent.*
- *To strive for fairness, inclusivity, and non-discrimination in the development and application of AI algorithms and marketing strategies.*

The Social Responsibility Marketing Ethics Oath should be more than a guideline and become a critical foundation for cultivating a responsible marketing education ecosystem. It compels marketing professionals and educators to prioritize privacy, inclusivity, and transparency, ensuring that AI's integration into marketing curricula fosters a learning environment rooted in ethical principles. Such an

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<sup>3</sup> AMA Statement of Ethics. Source: <https://www.ama.org/ama-statement-of-ethics/>



oath underscores the necessity of a conscientious application of AI, where technology serves to empower and educate rather than manipulate.

## 11 CONCLUSION

"The highest form of our art is to convince the customer without letting him know he's being convinced"

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. *Space Merchants*. p.70

Drawing a parallel to the novel's depiction of commercialization and the commodification of education—as seen through treating students as customers—alerts us to the perils of prioritizing immediate satisfaction over enduring knowledge and growth. Thus, it becomes imperative for educators to safeguard the essence and objectives of education against the pressures of market-driven metrics.

The necessity for a balanced integration of AI into marketing education—where educators and AI systems collaborate to enhance the educational experience without compromising ethical standards or educational integrity—becomes evident. This collaboration should not only aim to enrich the learning process but also prepare students to navigate the ethical complexities of a digitalized marketing landscape. In doing so, educators can ensure that the transformative potential of AI in marketing education is realized ethically and responsibly, thereby affirming that the dystopian outcomes portrayed in "The Space Merchants" remain firmly within the imagination of fiction.

In steering through this multifaceted terrain, the onus falls on marketing educators to model ethical conduct and ingrain a robust ethical framework within the curriculum. This involves not only fostering critical discussions around AI's misuse but also stimulating the creation of solutions that elevate human values above technological expediency. Such an educational ethos encourages a culture of thoughtful innovation among students. Collaboration with industry stakeholders and regulatory bodies to delineate ethical guidelines for AI's application in marketing is crucial. Advocating for accountability, transparency, and equity in the deployment of AI technologies positions educators as pivotal contributors to shaping an industry ethos that respects both individual rights and societal well-being, ensuring that the dystopian vistas depicted in *The Space Merchants* serve as a cautionary benchmark rather than a foregone conclusion.

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