

CMOs' Focus on Continual Growth and Progress to Strategically Reinvent Marketing's Operating Model

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Abstract

CMOs are under pressure to take the necessary steps to move forward within Marketing 7.0 and Loop Marketing, adapting accordingly to the ever-changing market. They have a special role to play in the agentic era beyond just improving productivity by applying AI. Focused on customer journey reshaping, CMOs are implanting customer-facing agents in their phygital channels. A recent analysis of retail data confirmed marketers' ability to ensure tasks orchestration and content generation with the help of AI. How the future of marketing seems closer than ever, there is an obvious CMOs' task to strategically reinvent marketing's operating model. CMOs need to strongly support the agentic decision based on a comprehensive governance framework and auditable trail.

Keywords: Marketing 7.0, Loop Marketing, Augmented Humans, Digital Marketing, Content-to-Commerce Loop, Phygital CX, AI Agents, Agentic AI

JEL Classification: D83; L81; L86; M15; M31; O32; O33

Marketing 7.0, Loop Marketing, and the challenge of the Augmented Humans in Marketing

Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2026) underlined from the very beginning of their recent published book "Marketing 7.0" (as a central connecting point of social, personal, and

experiential marketing to ensure customer's brain engagement with a brand more effectively) that personalization is now driven by AI in the phygital world (human behavior being shaped by physical environments and digital spaces), marketers being ready to experience the complex information-processing system which is human mind way of working, by considering cognitive science integration within the context of immersive technology enhanced by AI. To shape customers' decision-making, marketers need to approach cognitive marketing, creating meaningful connections by leveraging cognitive understanding of their customers, and translating into action the insights derived from these customers' way of processing attention and social input, as well as rewards (cognitive mapping, having as a key method empathic observation that allows decoding the minds of Gen Z, interpreting what customers do and why they do it (Gen Z being known as using AI-powered technologies and being augmented human parents of the newest generational cohort Gen Beta arrived in 2025)).

It is generally known in marketing the increasing role of the augmented humans (personalized AI experiences; digital avatars; virtual influencers; enhanced identity, brand identity being tied to digital self-expression). For instance, through wearable technology aesthetics and interactive digital avatars, the line between digital self-expression and physical identity can be made less clear within an augmented reality marketing campaign focused on creating an immersive bridge between viral digital engagement and physical shopping (based on mixing, for example, the social filters of a social media platform like TikTok and retail environments). And as to ensure both human judgment and empathy, as well as strategic control retainment it is essential within data and repetitive tasks handling based on the use of augmented humans in marketing, in place of self-contained business transactions, it is important to ensure the working together in the Loop Marketing (as a four stage framework – express, tailor, amplify, evolve – used by marketers to grow in the AI era) of augmented humans (doing better jobs as AI's and data tools' users), social media, and a social media platform like TikTok to obtain ongoing customer relationships building (HubSpot, 2026; Pierce, 2026; Donaldson, 2025; Jack, 2026).

Also, it is common knowledge in digital marketing that the marketer (focused on strategic direction, and considering both creativity and empathy) approves the action suggested by AI before it happens (Human-in-the-loop/ HITL), being in balanced control of the choices made by AI (focused on repetitive data tasks' handling, as well as content variations and real-time analytics) based on HITL checkpoints' use, and (among other aspects, including considering an AI registry) ensuring automate future decisions' improvement based on closed-loop marketing, digital marketing campaigns being optimized automatically with the help of continuous feedback. In the above-mentioned case of a full-funnel marketing engine and search platform like TikTok there is a direct connection between brands and their target audience, digital marketing campaigns being not only personal and trustworthy, but also efficient, valorizing marketer control and AI balance within its content-to-commerce loop. Product discovery and impulse purchases, as well as viral user advocacy are instantly driven by entertaining video

content given the infinite cycle (the journey being compressed into a continuous circle) ensured by TikTok's content-to-commerce loop, engaging CX being build this way by brands focused on exciting and entertaining shopping (TikTok, 2022). Seamlessly integrating content, community, and transaction, TikTok become (according to its head of strategic initiatives at TikTok Shop) a true lever for brand growth, shoppers' phygital discovery and shopping being redefined by the so-called discovery e-commerce (Fortune Brand Studio, 2026).

CMOs' urgent matters and their essential role in the agentic era beyond just improving productivity by applying AI

A traditional quarterly (Q3) analysis conducted by Gartner (2026) with regard to CMOs' highest-priority questions provided significant answers such as the need to make the default HITL and set the necessary stage for reducing strict monitoring or control repeatedly within the context of defining "what must remain human-owned vs. AI-automated". Also, it was underlined (among other aspects) the imperative of better understanding the evolution of customer discovery behaviors, ensuring the additional investments determination so as to adapt to answer engines.

But speaking about investments, it is important to not forget that CMOs need to change CEOs' and CFOs' perceptions of marketing's impact on growth, rebuilding their confidence in marketing. Which means that CMOs take action ensuring marketing accountabilities' clarifications (marketing's impact being demonstrated accordingly), improving authority and access by ensuring relationship-building efforts' prioritization, elucidating connections to CEOs' and CFOs' priorities with related CMOs' marketing initiatives, and to prove strategic expertise and insight into future trends, overcoming this way senior executives' expectation gap on marketing's impact (Gartner for Marketing, 2026).

And while being under pressure to prove strategic expertise and insight into future trends CMOs need to pay attention to more other significant aspects, such as: to make transition from descriptive tracking to predictive modeling easier; to reduce the perception gap between the strategic brand intent and CX; to improve identity and data problems' approach so as to make it easier a single user recognition across multiple devices and channels, as well as customer reach, trust building, data protection, connection between AI visibility metrics and marketer's pipeline data, and so on. And last but not least to minimize the distance between customer's adaptation in real time and marketer's faster response, focusing on driving growth by improving thinking about new technology and so-called apex customer as the savviest shopper using AI tools to shop and looking for ways to play (legally and ethically) the system, being focused on maximizing value (Aspell, 2026).

It is also worth showing here that according to Dhar et al. (2026) an essential role in defining the Agentic era will be played by the CMOs who move quickly using the richer class of data generated by the interaction between customers and AI, acting in three directions (ensuring stronger brands building, identification of where to create new value, and better CX designing), going beyond just improving productivity by applying AI. Consequently, CMOs can leverage the new customer intelligence created by Agentic AI, completely matching their brand promise with CX, marketing being redesigned around AI-enabled intelligence.

Focused on customer journey reshaping CMOs are implanting customer-facing agents in their phygital channels. A recent analysis of retail data confirmed marketers' ability to ensure tasks orchestration and content generation with the help of AI

As shown by Abraham et al. (2026), the customer journey is reshaped by GenAI and agentic marketing, to enhance their competitiveness CMOs building new capabilities (today's AI battleground being represented by discoverability), and CMOs implanting customer-facing agents in their own phygital channels. CMOs are paying attention to consistent brand identity and messaging maintenance based on the right governance and technology deployment, marketing technology and data (their new agentic stack having 4 layers: data, a brand intelligence layer, the agentic layer, and marketers' unified user interface) being now the primary investment area, the operating infrastructure being the differentiator.

Coming back to personalization (which, as above-mentioned from the very beginning, is now driven by AI in the phygital world), let us show how a recent report by Coresight Research – sponsored by Cloudinary (an AI-powered image and video platform) and Amazon Web Services (AWS, the world's largest cloud-service provider) – focused on retail marketing personalization shaped by AI, and revealed pertinent answers with regard to significant aspects: A unified customer intelligence layer forms the foundation for personalized marketing; AI helps determine the next-best marketing action; AI delivers hyper personalized content, recommendations and experiences; AI orchestrates real-time contextual marketing; Using AI to continuously manage and improve customer relationships (Harmon, 2026). The rigorous analysis made by Coresight Research highlighted marketers' ability to ensure tasks orchestration and content generation (delivered by real-time orchestration, content being shaped by decisioning fed by customer intelligence) with the help of GenAI and agentic AI, automatically transforming into relevant and timely personalized media what is documented about the target customer, new data being reinjected by continuous relationship management. Therefore, the underlined marketers' capabilities will intensify with models and platforms' moving ahead behind them (within marketers connected operating model).

It is worth remembering that GenAI is considered a functional precursor to AI Agents (Sapkota, Roumeliotis and Karkee, 2026), dynamically commands execution being ensured by AI agents (which are enabling application domains such as customer support, scheduling, and data summarization, their progress being based on both tool integration and prompt engineering, as well as reasoning enhancements), while agentic AI (Google Cloud, 2026) is focused on autonomous decision-making and action with minimal human intervention (setting goals, planning, and executing tasks). It is generally known that marketers are using AI agents to turn the insights obtained after root causes' identification (of campaigns failures, for instance) into action. And beyond autonomous campaign optimization or intent-based lead qualification, marketers are using AI agents to customized communication, audience segmentation and alignment so as to ensure scalable personalization (Juni, 2026).¹

Instead of conclusions: *How the future of marketing seems closer than ever,*

there is an obvious CMOs' task to strategically reinvent

marketing's operating model

According to Drenik (2026),² a lot of marketing decisions' making, execution, and recording is changed by agentic AI, CMOs needing to strongly supporting the agentic decision based on a comprehensive governance framework and auditable trail. Judging whether the agentic AI decision was a winning decision for the marketing organizations requires to evaluate the outcomes beyond speed and scale, both explaining and defending how these outcomes were reached by the agents used, governance needing to be built into execution.

CMOs are required by the current transformation to develop new capabilities (such as technical fluency, enhanced collaboration skills, creative direction, strategic data interpretation and so on.), so as to lead the Human-AI partnership, by orchestrating the harmony between human creativity and AI capability, and blending AI adoption with marketing's most human qualities' elevation (Chmael, 2026). In the opinion of the Vice President and Principal Analyst at Forrester Research (based in Paris), Thomas Husson (Gourvennec, 2026): CMOs role will change, marketing's existence as a discipline being not in question, despite the pressures building on marketing organizations; it is a mistake that AI deployment is being driven in general by CIOs and CTOs while CMOs are responsible for only 8 to 10% of organizations' AI strategy

¹ Juni, R., 2026. AI Agents for Marketing: Benefits, Use Cases, Key Features & Top Solutions for 2026, Demandbase, April 2. Available at: <<https://www.demandbase.com/blog/ai-agents-for-marketing/>> [Accessed 13 September 2026].

² Drenik, G., 2026. CMOs Should Question How AI Agents Make Decisions, Forbes, Jul 16. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/garydrenik/2026/07/16/cmoss-should-question-how-ai-agents-make-decisions/>> [Accessed 13 September 2026].

leadership (consequently, the disconnect between a secure, scalable AI platform and marketers' needs is too big, and shadow AI flourishes).

And allow us to end by quoting three relevant sources:

- Esber et al. (2026): “Human-led insights—grounded in cultural understanding, qualitative sense-making, and strategic judgment—will remain essential complements to the precision and scalability that agentic AI enables. The real challenge will be in navigating the uncharted territory where human judgment and creativity intersect with AI-driven precision and execution, and in doing so, redefining the very fabric of marketing itself.”
- Stein et al. (2026): “The future of marketing will not be defined by how well organizations use AI tools but by how well they connect insight, creativity, personalization, agentic commerce, and execution into a single, continuously improving system. For CMOs, the task is to design that system so that the benefits of AI finally move from a promising opportunity to the bottom line.”
- Abatangle (2026): “The Adaptive Intelligence Marketing (AIM) model marks a fundamental shift in how marketing delivers value... Marketing functions that remain organized around campaigns, channels and manual coordination will struggle to scale agentic AI safely and effectively. Those that proactively reimagine marketing’s operating model — which CMOs most commonly cited as the area needing significant change — will be better positioned to control growth decisions and prepare their organizations for an autonomous business future...”

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