

Language as Means and Ends: How Generative Artificial Intelligence Automates, Amplifies, and Reinvents Language in Marketing

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ABSTRACT Is language a means or an end in marketing? In other words, is it merely a tool to achieve certain goals, or is language itself part of what creates value for consumers and firms? These questions become newly urgent in the age of generative artificial intelligence (AI), especially the age of large language models. Drawing from interviews with senior marketing professionals across diverse industries, this industry-perspectives article adopts a translational approach. We surface how practitioners conceptualize the role of language in their day-to-day work and carry those insights back into the academic discourse. We further identify two recurring perspectives—language as a strategic tool (means) and language as a value generator in itself (ends)—and examine how generative AI bridges these two perspectives. To that end, we develop a conceptual framework and propositions organized around three AI-enabled functions—automation, amplification, and reinvention—and map each function onto the means–ends distinction.

Language is everywhere in human existence, and its prevalence across the marketing domain more than justifies giving it systematic attention. Brands are built, promises are made, and value is negotiated largely through words. With the meteoric rise of generative AI in general and large language models (LLMs) specifically, interest has surged in how to more effectively integrate the principles of language into marketing activities ranging from messaging via advertisements, emails, and social media posts to dynamic interactions in chatbots and voice assistants. Research on AI in marketing documents how AI reshapes targeting and customer journeys (e.g., Puntoni and Wertenbroch 2024; Valenzuela et al. 2024), but they largely treat language as an input or output rather than as a more central topic of inquiry. As generative AI participates in, and sometimes originates, the language of the marketplace, it seems warranted to understand

how language functions both as an instrument and as a potential source of value generation. This is not only a theoretical concern but a practical one for marketers and consumers alike.

While this *JACR* issue is broadly focused on advancing research on linguistics in marketing, the aim of this industry-perspectives article is translational: to surface how marketing practitioners themselves conceptualize the role of language in their day-to-day work and to carry those insights back into the academic discourse. To do so, we interviewed five senior practitioners from diverse industries and roles. Industries covered business-to-consumer and business-to-business domains, and included web hosting, internet services, entrepreneurship tools, marketing and advertising services, home security, and entertainment. Roles varied from senior manager to chief executive officer, with several holding top positions at their firms.

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We asked our respondents how language is managed inside their firms (e.g., whether there are dedicated roles or teams, formal processes, or testing regimes focused on language), how their use of language has evolved over time, and where they encounter challenges such as uncertainty about what wording actually drives consumer engagement and trust. We also invited them to recall specific instances where language played a decisive role in a marketing outcome, to reflect on the types of language that tend to build consumer trust, and to articulate the questions about language in marketing they would most like academic researchers to address. And finally, we asked them a common set of questions, such as how their firms are using LLMs such as ChatGPT, what opportunities they see, and what concerns they have about AI-generated language for both internal communication and consumer-facing messaging. We synthesized the interview data into a set of recurring themes and to build an industry-to-academia translational framework to help answer the central question of this article: Do marketing practitioners ultimately treat language primarily as means (i.e., a strategic tool) or as ends (i.e., constitutive of generating value in itself) or both?

Answering this question seems warranted because, while previous research on language in marketing has typically focused on how linguistic features—such as assertiveness, precision, or tonal elements—shape persuasion and product enjoyment (for reviews see, e.g., Kronrod 2022; Packard and Berger 2024), much less attention has been paid to how practitioners themselves talk about language as a strategic resource, particularly in the emerging context of generative AI, and to how these practice-based views might translate into research agendas.

LANGUAGE AS MEANS: A STRATEGIC TOOL

In marketing and consumer research, language is frequently treated as a means: a controllable tool deployed to drive outcomes such as brand name preference (Lowrey and Shrum 2007; Pogacar et al. 2021), word of mouth (Packard and Berger 2017), customer-firm interaction (Packard et al. 2018), interest and attention (Hamby and Van Laer 2022), and engagement (Berger et al. 2023). In this instrumental view, words are adjustable levers. They can be tuned to fit brand goals and expectations of target audiences, much like pricing or channeling can.

Several practitioners described this: One company founder explained that copywriters and account managers routinely calibrate language along dimensions such as playful versus serious or brand-building versus direct selling, depending on

campaign objectives and target segments. This reflects a utilitarian conceptualization of language; it is crafted not for its own sake but to serve the brand. A brand strategist in a large technology firm similarly emphasized the role of centralized teams and guidelines in ensuring that language reflects the brand's core values.

Language as a tool also appears in more tactical work. One practitioner recounted how shifting outbound sales messaging from a highly structured, formal tone to a more personal one led to higher response rates and deeper engagement with prospects. Another practitioner described using narrative templates to craft communications aimed at entrepreneurs and small-business owners, with the explicit goal of engineering resonance and identification. In both cases, language is used as a manipulable variable in optimization problems; if the wording changes, the practitioner's hope is that behavioral outcomes will change as well.

AI reinforces and even extends this instrumental perspective: Several practitioners reported using LLMs both for content generation and for internal tasks like summarizing research, drafting documentation, or standardizing tone across teams. One practitioner likened LLMs to “an army of 17-year-old interns” who can brainstorm options, generate first drafts, and synthesize information but still require supervision and refinement. Another respondent highlighted how LLMs are being integrated into systems that understand and classify user content, inform recommendations, and help generate or adapt playlists and product descriptions at scale. In these cases, language is treated as a functional asset that can be scaled, tested, and optimized to improve both product and customer experience. Even the challenges that our practitioners described were framed in instrumental terms. Localization, for example, is seen less as a cultural project and more as a technical and organizational problem: how to maintain tone, intent, and effectiveness across markets, languages, and regulatory environments.

Taken together, these accounts portray an instrumental logic: language is conceptualized as an adjustable resource that can be engineered to move marketing metrics. Practitioners talk about words in the same register as other controllable marketing variables; that is, something to be segmented, standardized, A/B tested, and optimized. Tone is dialed up or down, narrative structure is selected or discarded, and even voice is treated as a parameter to be managed. The arrival of generative AI intensifies this orientation by making language both more abundant and more malleable: LLMs can supply a limitless stream of drafts and variations that can be rapidly iterated. In this environment, the strategic question is less

what do we want to say and how? but more *how should we leverage AI-suggested language to best accomplish our goal for this audience in this context?* Furthermore, challenges are framed not as threats to the intrinsic meaning of language but as technical constraints to be solved in order to maintain or improve functional performance. In short, within the language-as-means perspective, language (human- or AI-generated) is valued primarily for what it does: a means through which firms seek to generate outcomes.

LANGUAGE AS ENDS: A CULTURAL AND EMOTIONAL VALUE GENERATOR IN ITSELF

Although marketing practitioners often describe language as a tool, our interviews also suggested a second perspective: language as part of what is being built and protected, not just as being used. From this viewpoint, language is not merely an instrument to drive marketing outcomes but a core expression of the brand's identity and values (Kronrod and Danziger 2013; Moore and McFerran 2017; Kronrod 2022; Lafreniere et al. 2022; Kronrod et al. 2023). Accordingly, language is something to be cultivated over time, tended like an asset, and experienced by consumers as a form of cultural and emotional value in its own right (Schellekens et al. 2010; Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). This language-as-ends perspective is consistent with work on close brand relationships, which shows that beloved brands are often encountered and maintained through their distinctive voice, metaphorical narratives, and their messaging's conversational style, and can thus become incorporated into the self and even provide emotional support like close others can (Reimann et al. 2012, 2017; Aerts et al. 2017; Do et al. 2024).

Several practitioners described this perspective: One emphasized that effective language must reflect a shared worldview and values and argued that tone and style are central to perceived authenticity, not just peripheral. Another practitioner recommended treating the brand as a person with a biography and using that imagined biography to guide decisions about voice and tone. These perspectives shift language from a tool to a cultural artifact: the way a brand speaks is part of who it is, and that who becomes what customers are buying into.

For practitioners working in content- and culture-intensive marketplaces, language as ends in itself appears particularly salient. A product leader at a global audio-streaming platform described how language is woven into the company's mission statement and slogans, as well as into playlist names. As such, language is not just a tool for engagement but a primary way the firm signals its identity and sense of belonging with its

customers. Small linguistic choices, such as how a playlist is titled, how a recommendation is phrased, are treated as moments where the brand's personality and values are made tangible.

Another practitioner described similar dynamics in the context of generative-AI communication. In response to user reactions, their firm deliberately shifted its language around AI features to emphasize conception and experimentation rather than fully automated production. This adjustment was not framed simply as a performance optimization but seemed as an attempt to better match the firm's language with users' fears and hopes. In this sense, language functions as a vehicle for empathy. It helps firms humanize the technology, signal respect for creative labor, and articulate what the company stands for.

Notably, when our practitioners reflected on what they wished academic researchers would study, many of their questions implicitly assumed this language-as-ends perspective. One interviewee working on global campaigns asked how specific linguistic dimensions shape emotional response and long-term engagement across cultures. Another raised some questions about how consistent exposure to a brand's voice over the years might contribute to customer trust and a sense of shared identity. These inquiries treat language itself as the outcome to be understood and refined and as a locus that warrants sustained scholarly attention. Based on these questions, it appears that language is not only a means to drive behavior but also as the enduring medium through which brands exist and are emotionally anchored in consumers' lives.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that practitioners do not only instrumentalize language but also sacralize it. Alongside the optimization logic documented in the language-as-means perspective, there is a parallel logic in which language is treated as part of the brand's very substance. Generative AI, in this latter perspective, is not simply a tool but a new site of contestation over voice and authenticity. Practitioners worry not only about what AI-generated language does but about what it sounds like and what that sound implies about the brand's character. The questions they pose to researchers about emotion, trust, identity, and culture underscore that language is itself a core source of value. In short, within the language-as-ends perspective, language (human- or AI-generated) is a cultural and emotional value generator.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: TOWARD A HOLISTIC VIEW OF LANGUAGE IN MARKETING

Across interviews, it became clear that the distinction between language-as-ends and language-as means is less a

dichotomy than a dynamic tension that practitioners navigate in their work every day. On the one hand, language is treated as an adjustable variable in the service of marketplace outcomes. On the other hand, it is treated as a repository of identity and meaning, something that must be protected, curated, and allowed to resonate with consumers over time. We found that effective marketing, in practice, seems to require holding both views at once: an instrumental precision without losing cultural and emotional depth, and a rich brand voice without abandoning strategic decision making.

This duality is particularly visible in how practitioners talk about trust, which resonates with sociological and organizational theories of trust. For example, based on prior work, Schilke et al. (2021) conceptualize trust as a willingness to be vulnerable based on expectations of a partner's trustworthiness, and they emphasize that trust judgments rest on perceptions of the trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity, which are informed by relationship history and anticipated future interactions. In our interview data, one practitioner described trust as emerging from a consistent tone anchored in a clear brand biography, which suggests that language can be used to signal a brand's ability or integrity. Another practitioner emphasized aspirational yet supportive language as a way to position the brand as a partner in the customer journey, not just a seller by using tone to communicate benevolence, and one noted that sounding like consumers understand what the brand is here for is central to earning consumers' trust in personalization and recommendations, which maps onto the idea that trust depends on how the brand is categorized as a trustee and on the specific trust object at stake.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that trust is not built only through what language accomplishes behaviorally (e.g., clicks, sign-ups, and conversions) but also through how it shapes expectations about who the brand is (trustee radius), who is doing the trusting (which consumers, in which contexts), and what exactly is being trusted (e.g., the content of recommendations, the fairness of prices, or the handling of customer data). In terms of Schilke et al.'s (2021) framework, practitioners are implicitly managing multiple trust radii at once through language: they use consistency, empathy, and contextual fit in brand voice to influence consumers' willingness to become vulnerable to the brand across different situations and over time.

Operational challenges further underscore the need for a holistic view that bridges the language-as-means and language-as-end perspectives. Decisions about localization and tone adaptation are rarely framed as purely semantic problems

(Kronrod et al. 2012; Grinstein and Kronrod 2016); they are seen as balancing acts between preserving clarity and maintaining cultural fit (Ludwig et al. 2013; Luna et al. 2013; Luangrath et al. 2017). One practitioner described steering away from certain pricing and product terms that performed well in tests but carried negative connotations in particular markets, which shows how word choice can have unanticipated symbolic consequences. Another practitioner emphasized the importance of monitoring emerging language and stylistic shifts, both to inform prompt engineering for AI tools and to avoid sounding tone-deaf in fast-moving cultural environments. Language, in this sense, is again simultaneously an object of optimization and an evolving cultural signal that requires constantly evolving interpretation.

From this vantage point, the future of language in marketing will hinge on the ability of firms to integrate these perspectives rather than choose between them. LLMs make it easier than ever to generate, test, and personalize language, which reinforces the "means" perspective. Yet brands that consumers most admire are often those whose language felt recognizably human and culturally attuned, which reinforces the "ends" perspective. A holistic view therefore treats language as both means and ends.

FROM INDUSTRY TO ACADEMIA: A TRANSLATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS FOR HOW GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AUTOMATES, AMPLIFIES, AND REINVENTS MESSAGING

Our interviews further suggested that practitioners are already working with generative AI through three intertwined lenses that reflect on language as means versus language as ends: as a way to *automate* language work (which we define as the creation and generation of language and content), to *amplify* the reach and precision of marketing through systems of messages, and to *reinvent* what counts as a marketing message in the first place. In this section, we attempt to translate practice-based insights into a conceptual framework that can guide future academic inquiry. The framework is explicitly translational by taking ideas and categories that emerged from industry experts and rearticulating them as analytically useful dimensions for research on language, marketing, and AI. Note that this framework is neither thought to be mutually exclusive nor conceptually exhaustive but an attempt to sort insights about language as means versus language as ends into an interconnected outline of ideas.

We organize the framework around three core functions—automation, amplification, and reinvention—and show how each function operates across the language-as-means and language-as-ends perspectives discussed earlier. Table 1 illustrates the framework, and further we elaborate on each component in the table. The horizontal axis captures three practitioner-defined functions of generative AI (automation, amplification, reinvention), while the vertical axis captures orientations to language as strategic tool (means) versus value generator (ends).

Means Automation Versus Ends Automation

Across firms and industries, the most immediate role of generative AI is automation: offloading routine or labor-intensive language tasks to LLMs. Practitioners described using LLMs to draft emails, blog posts, review summaries, internal documentation, research summaries, and even initial versions of brand guidelines. One practitioner likened an LLM to a human capable of generating large amounts of text, synthesizing in-

formation, and producing first drafts that humans then refine. From the language-as-means perspective, automation lowers the marginal cost of language. Tasks that previously required scarce copywriting resources can now be attempted by a broader set of employees. This shifts organizational decisions about when and where language is customized, how many variants are tested, and which channels receive tailored messaging. From the language-as-ends perspective, automation raises questions about who is authorized to speak for the brand and how human oversight is structured to protect voice, values, and authenticity (Valenzuela et al. 2024). This suggests a first set of translational propositions for future research on AI-driven language:

P1: Language-as-means automation lowers the cost of language work and changes marketing tasks and skills. As LLMs take over language work, certain language activities will remain core and highly human-controlled,

Table 1. A Translational Framework for How Generative AI Automates, Amplifies, and Reinvents Language as Means and Ends in Marketing

Language	Automation	Amplification	Reinvention
Means (tool)	<p><i>AI-driven language-as-means automation lowers the cost of language work and changes marketing tasks and skills.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LLMs as “interns” for drafting and summarizing. • More message variations and more testing with less human time. 	<p><i>AI-driven language-as-means amplification changes the unit of analysis for language from single messages to systems of messages.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hyperpersonalized” messaging. • Language as an input to experimentation in constant A/B testing of variants. • Multichannel campaigns. 	<p><i>AI-driven language-as-means reinvention blurs the boundary between organization-internal and external language.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational interfaces. • AI assistants. • Advertising creative content development.
Ends (value generator)	<p><i>AI-driven language-as-ends automation reconfigures authenticity, perceived authorship, and governance.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human oversight to keep brand voice intact despite AI drafting. • Tension over who is speaking for the brand. 	<p><i>AI-driven language-as-ends amplification intensifies trade-offs between personalization and coherence.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent tone from messaging. • Localization versus globalization. 	<p><i>AI-driven language-as-ends reinvention turns interaction flows into conversation.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product names, AI suggestions, and “coauthored” content. • Language as the way consumers understand what AI is and what the brand stands for.

while others will be delegated to AI and become commoditized.

P2: Language-as-ends automation reconfigures authenticity, perceived authorship, and governance. As LLMs take over language work, marketers will differentially attribute responsibility for failure or success to AIs versus humans and will establish new governance structures to guard the value of language.

Means Amplification Versus Ends Amplification

A second function of generative AI is language amplification. Practitioners emphasized using LLMs to increase the volume and granularity of messaging to create more variants, tailor content to more segments, and maintain consistent tone across more touchpoints. One practitioner highlighted efforts to use AI-generated drafts to keep language echoing core values and messaging from sales decks to support scripts. Another one described LLMs embedded in content understanding and recommendation systems, which help shape how users encounter and interpret language at a larger scale. In the language-as-means perspective, amplification means more tests, more personalization, and more fine-grained optimization. Language becomes an input into experimentation engines, where small variations can be evaluated for their effects on marketplace outcomes. In the language-as-ends perspective, amplification raises the stakes for consistency; if AI helps put the brand's voice into every interaction, then this drift in messaging can now occur at scale as well. This points to a second set of translational questions about AI-driven language:

P3: Language-as-means amplification changes the unit of analysis for language from a single message to systems of messages.¹ AI-driven language work will require future research to understand the effects of systems of messages (rather than single messages) on marketplace outcomes.

P4: Language-as-ends amplification intensifies trade-offs between personalization and coherence. AI-driven language work will require future research to contrast local adaptation (what works for a given consumer in a

given moment) and global coherence (what the brand sounds like overall).

Means Reinvention Versus Ends Reinvention

The third function that emerges is reinvention: Generative AI not only changes how language is produced and scaled, but it also expands what counts as “messaging” at all. Practitioners in content-rich and AI-pushing firms described language as increasingly embedded in interactions with recommendation systems, creative tools, and conversational interfaces. Playlist titles, AI assistants, the phrasing of suggested prompts, and even the language that users see as they shape AI outputs were all cited as sites where brand meaning is negotiated. Here, language functions less as a discrete message and more as a dynamic process. An engineering manager emphasized that the way employees talk to AI systems influences the language that emerges from them. A marketing leader in creative software described deliberate shifts in how the company talked about its own AI features to match creators' identities. In these cases, language shapes how the offering is understood and used. Reinvention therefore raises a third set of translational propositions about AI-driven language:

P5: Language-as-means reinvention blurs the boundary between organization-internal and external language. AI-driven language work will require future research to examine how internal language practices (e.g., how teams talk to and about AI) leak into consumer-facing experiences.

P6: Language-as-ends reinvention turns interaction flows into conversation. AI-driven language work will require future research to analyze conversational trajectories (rather than static text), coauthored outputs, and “microencounters” with AI as sources of value creation.

Integrating the Framework: From Practice-Based Insights to Research Agendas

Taken together, the framework offers a way to systematize a small set of practitioners' insights and translate them into conceptual ideas and content for future research agendas. It also suggests that generative AI does not simply push language further toward being a tool or further toward being a value generator. Instead, it intensifies both logics in parallel: Automation primarily deepens the tool logic by making

1. This might mean multiple messages across multiple channels and recipients, as well as the same one consumer receiving multiple messages over time and across channels.

language cheaper and more commoditized, while simultaneously raising questions about authorship and authenticity that are central to the value-generation logic. Amplification uses language as a tool to optimize and personalize yet makes the ongoing coherence of language as value generator more consequential than before. Reinvention foregrounds language as value generator through which AI, brand, and user meet, while embedding language in “engineered” tool environments.

For marketing and consumer researchers, this suggests at least three directions. First, conceptual work is needed to theorize language not just as content but as infrastructure and process in AI-mediated marketplaces. Second, empirical research can leverage the very tools practitioners use (e.g., LLMs, large-scale experiments, interaction logs) to study how automated, amplified, and reinvented language affects consumer behavior, trust, identity, and culture. Third, future work is needed to examine whose voices are amplified or erased, how authenticity is constructed in AI-heavy environments, and what forms of governance and accountability are appropriate when much of the “speaking” is done by machines. Pursuing these directions also requires caution: recent evidence suggests that even well-intentioned transparency about AI involvement can paradoxically erode trust in communicators, which underscores how AI-mediated language is entangled with legitimacy and moral evaluation (Schilke and Reimann 2025).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our industry-based inquiry emphasized that language in AI-mediated marketing cannot be reduced to either a neutral instrument or a purely symbolic resource. It is simultaneously means and ends, and generative AI intensifies both perspectives. Practitioners treat language as a tool while also regarding it as part of what the brand is and how this generates value. By translating these practice-grounded insights into a framework of means-versus-ends-based automation, amplification, and reinvention, we highlighted how LLMs alter the economics of language work, reconfigure systems of messaging, and expand what counts as “a message” in the first place. For marketing scholarship, this suggests the need to theorize language not only as content but as a value-generating process. For practice, our framework suggests that the firms most likely to thrive in an AI-rich future will be those that use generative tools with instrumental rigor as well as cultural and emotional sensitivity.

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